Summer 2000

Senior Project: A Paradox in Critical Pedagogy

Mark Allen Winters

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A Dissertation Presented to the College of Graduate Studies of

Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

in

Curriculum Studies

by

Mark Allen Winters

July 2000

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To the Graduate College:

This dissertation entitled "Senior Project: A Project for a Critical Pedagogy" and written by Mark Allen Winters is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Curriculum Studies.

Dr. William M. Reynolds, Chairperson

We have reviewed this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Delores D. Liston, Member

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Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs
and Dean of Graduate Studies

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to a master teacher and a critical researcher without whose patience, perseverance, and passion I would not have had the ability to complete this course of study. With a heart full of admiration, I dedicate this dissertation and my doctoral degree to my wife, Belinda Winters. Her enthusiasm for education has inspired me to reach for goals that I alone could never have reached. We have shared not only a loving companionship and friendship but also the joys and frustrations of academic studies. Together, we have worked toward our undergraduate and graduate degrees. Now, we have together labored for the degree of doctor of education. As we both submit our individual research, words cannot express the pleasure I have derived from studying with someone so passionate and so discerning as my wife. She has given me strength to persevere when I would have ceased my efforts. Her dedication to improving the education of the boys and girls in her school and in our county has motivated me to reach for the same level of dedication. As an educator and as a person, she is my role model. Therefore, I submit this research to the literature of curriculum studies in the spirit and passion that she personifies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I recognize the support of my wife who has been instrumental in providing feedback and encouragement as we both struggled with our studies. We have been each other's sounding board for ideas and frustrations throughout this endeavor. The journey toward this point has been a joyous adventure we have shared as both of us have completed our doctoral work and dissertations.

I acknowledge the support and guidance of several other individuals whose assistance has made my pursuit of a doctoral degree in curriculum studies possible. First, William Reynolds, my dissertation committee chair, provided guidance through his classes and through his insight as a curriculum scholar. Secondly, my dissertation committee, Delores Liston, Robert Warkentin, and Gary Hytrek provided guidance and support that helped me strive for a standard that reflects dedication to the profession of education. Likewise, Bryan Deever was a valued member of my committee who provided sagacious advice concerning my research until his premature death. Additionally, Edmund C. Short, as my original adviser, provided levelheaded guidance throughout my initial efforts to pursue a doctoral degree.

Within my school system, several individuals assisted me as I struggled with my studies. My superintendent, Dr. J. Michael Moore, provided inspiration as I moved from the classroom into school leadership and curriculum studies. His ability to conceptualize the big picture within my career has been invaluable. The county's Board of Education has provided valuable leadership as I have implemented programs such as Senior Project. Their wisdom and guidance has contributed to the high quality of educational experiences for both students and educators. My principal, Dr. Franklin Goldwire, has provided direction as I learned how to lead my fellow educators while I also pursued my doctoral degree. Terri Powers has provided great insight into the classroom by sharing the workload of implementing Senior Project at our school. She also provided a great service as a proofreader of my dissertation. Her insight has been invaluable. Furthermore, I recognize the great support of the faculty and staff of my school. Their compassionate understanding and dedication to providing quality experiences for our students has taught me a great deal about education and about working with high school students. I have learned much from my interactions with these friends and colleagues.

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In addition, I acknowledge the support and guidance of Dr. Paula Egelson and SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE). Without the innovative research and guidance of Dr. Egelson and SERVE, I would not have pursued the implementation of Senior Project at my school or the research that I have conducted into Senior Project. With the support of SERVE and Dr. Egelson, I plan on continuing to research and implement the ideology of Senior Project as I continue my work as an educator.

Finally, I acknowledge the students with whom I have worked and learned. Specifically, I recognize the graduating classes of 1998, 1999, and 2000. I have taught and interacted with these students as a teacher and as an assistant principal. As these students graduated and moved on to pursuits as adults, I have learned as much if not more from them than they have learned from me. These students have given me great insight into working with high school students as together we negotiated the paradox of graduation and emancipation.

VITA

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1989-1990 Substitute Teacher
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ABSTRACT

SENIOR PROJECT: A PARADOX IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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Mark Allen Winters

High school education is currently based upon technicist pedagogy, transforming education into mere technical training for the workforce. The regimen of testing in schools standardizes experiences and fails to provide a complete view of what students know and are able to do. Students need freedom to question and to insert their own interests into what they are studying. Such freedom provides more than preparation for graduation; it provides emancipatory education. I focused on a single curricular program—Senior Project. My research questioned, "Can Senior Project provide high school students with the freedom to study topics of personal interest and the freedom to exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without violating the freedom from intrusion?" The purpose of the study was to determine if a school could provide freedom from intrusion while at the same time disrupting the status-quo goals of training students for the labor market.

My study focused on senior English classes while they were engaged in Senior Project as a culminating experience during their final year of high school. My methodology included a case study that utilized interviews, observations, and reflections. Data was gathered from interactions with students, teachers and community members. To broaden my research, I also utilized archived data from the previous two years of Senior Project at this school. For analysis, I identified themes that emerged from the data. Senior Project offered a means through which students could incorporate interests into the curriculum while rigorously researching these interests and experiencing learning both in

the school and in the community. Senior Project provided opportunities for students to conduct critical inquiries. I found that more emphasis was needed in guiding students into areas of critical inquiry, so they feel comfortable and competent in conducting such inquiries. Furthermore, Senior Project offered a rite of passage from teenager to adult. The premise behind Senior Project contributed to a senior year transition project similar to the one outlined by U.S. Secretary of Education Riley. Thus, high school students can experience critical learning and develop critical knowledge through emancipatory education that prepares teenagers for the adult world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I walked out of the house dressed in clothing purchased specially for this occasion. A sense of excited enthusiasm engulfed my being. Armed with the supplies needed for success in this new endeavor, I treaded lightly down the steps and the walkway from my childhood refuge toward the experiences and explorations of a Brave New World. This glorious day had been one for which my parents and I had longed. Under a blue sky illuminated with pastels of orange, peach, and yellow tinted clouds, my mother watched and stopped me along the way to take pictures of the ceremonious event—my first day of school. In one hand, I clutched my Batman lunchbox, and in the other hand, I tightly held the writing tablet, pencils, crayons, and school supplies to be used in my educational explorations. I stopped at virtually every step along this path to allow my mother to photograph this momentous occasion in my life, hers, and our family's. I was my parents' first child to leave home for the wonders of the schoolhouse; my younger brother watched and anticipated his schooling experiences yet to come.

As I have gazed at these pictures over the years, I have chuckled at the poses that I struck for the camera. Excitement filled my face and wonderment reflected from eyes. Eventually, I boarded the yellow school bus as if it were a ship sailing for exotic, faraway lands. Obviously, schooling represented an experience that marked my transition from being a child to being a "big boy". My parents turned what became a ritualized routine into a ceremonious episode in my schooling experience that has continued to the point

where I have arrived today—the ceremony of engaging in a study that will result in a doctoral degree. It is here from my current perspective that the words of Jacqueline Ancess and Linda Darling-Hammond (1994) concerning students involved in a Senior Project program are particularly poignant. "In short, they [students] are again becoming the inquiring learners they were when they entered kindergarten years ago, before they learned how to behave in schools" (p. 23). I have returned to the wonderment and excitement of searching for what I have not yet learned, and it is my dream to help the students with whom I share daily experiences attain the same excited wonderment about questioning, pondering, searching, and learning.

Today, I live in two worlds—one world of curriculum theorists and educational philosophers who challenge my thinking at the university and the other world of high school teenagers who challenge my developing pedagogy and my ability to engage in negotiations regarding their education. This study will combine my experiences in both these worlds, and I hope will combine the best each has to offer as I analyze the data that I will collect and the experiences I share in those hollowed halls of academia known as HIGH SCHOOL.

Textbooks, mesh book bags, tennis shoes, T-shirts, blue jeans baggy and sagging, athletic jerseys, baseball caps, earrings worn in ears as well as in other pierced body parts, lipstick of various hues, CDs stuffed into book bags—these images as well as others constitute a polychromatic description of high school students. Yet, what is the high school experience for these teenagers, these young adults, as this century closes and a new millenium dawns? High school is a conglomeration of experiences layered upon at least eight years of experiences in school and in life. For some, the high school

experience is measured in terms of scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the high school graduation test, and various other standardized forms of assessment. Yet, by standing in the entrance to a high school, we can readily see that students come from a complex variety of backgrounds, personalities, and experiences. Students enter high school with diverse needs, interests, emotions, and experiences carrying various items not only externally in their book bags but also internally in their personas. Within students exist resources to be discovered and utilized as their educational experiences bring them ever closer to that ceremonious graduation walk.

A tapestry of colors breathe life that is full of love, hatred, passion, and pain as a cacophony of voices blend together in the production of a drama called the high school experience. Grumet (1998) states, "Drama invites the whole person into its spotlight" (p. 142). Some of these students chase after the spotlight whose warmth has created an addiction as powerful as any narcotic—to be seen, to be noticed, to be in the lime light is what some students live for. Yet, others who have never been in the spotlight take refuge in the shadows out of fear that the bright light is too blinding or too revealing. It is our job as educators to help students see that this drama of life is not so foreboding, not so ominous as to cause fear, dread, and even panic attacks. This drama holds a role for each student; the key is to unlock the script in which that role is contained. Grumet (1998) proclaims:

> This degree of presence, dancing to the music, squinting under the lights, or feeling the dread of time and mortality in the weight of Yorick's skull, invites the education of emotion as well as cognition. Nevertheless it not only brings bodies on stage, it also brings these bodies, our bodies into play. (p. 142)

Students in our schools are standing on a stage where we, as students, once stood, and we, as educators, are standing on a stage where other educators once stood. On this

stage, there are past and present experiences full of emotion as well as cognition. All lived-experiences upon the stages of schooling offer lessons from which students and educators can learn. I assert that it is the combined learning of emotion and cognition that make mature learners who become passionate about knowledge and excited about wondering if the answers before us are the only answers to be found.

When I began my studies as a doctoral student, I was teaching eleventh and ninth grade English classes at Salzburg Estates High School (SEHS). This high school is located in a South Georgia county that borders an urban area. This school was opened in 1996 as a second high school in this rural county. Rapid growth has transformed the area around SEHS from a rural locale into a suburban community adjacent to a sprawling city. The enrollment at SEHS during the 1997-1998 school year reached an average of 933 which was an increase in the average enrollment of 859 during the 1996-1997 school year. Growth has continued during the 1999-2000 school year with an average enrollment of 1049. For the 2000-2001 school year, enrollment is predicted to reach 1185, which demonstrates steady growth within the school's student body and within the Salzburg Estates community.

As an English teacher, I had become convinced that students possessed energy that could be a driving force in their own educational endeavors. My pedagogical repertoire consisted of numerous writing exercises that required students to explore personal interests as they learned and refined their academic skills. Whether the writing exercise was centered on a piece of literature or other foci, I believed that it was important to help students discover some aspect of personal interest in the topic. For instance, an essay on Huck Finn could take students into the areas of race relations, teenage runaways, or the

importance of nature in our lives, to name just a few areas of possible interest. Essays on The Scarlet Letter or O Pioneers! would often take students into an investigation of topics such as women's rights, feminism and the natural landscape, religion and women, or women in nontraditional roles such as the military. My American literature classes each year would write an essay in which they researched "The American Dream" and then personalize it with their own version of "The American Dream".

Often I would require my students to create an extension of their writing. This would be in the form of a video, a portfolio, a model of a scene, or pictures of themselves acting out a scene in period costume. Some students chose to write poems that were inspired by their readings or their research. Other students would create artwork depicting how they viewed a character or an event. My goal was to get students personally involved with the direction of their educational experiences.

During my last year as an English teacher, I found out about SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) and their research and development in the area of authentic assessment. SERVE is an educational laboratory funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The rationale SERVE gives for researching assessment, accountability, and standards states:

> Often large-scale assessment can lead to sorting students based on achievement levels, and this process can limit the sharing of other pertinent information that might be important for making informed decisions to help students achieve. Many schools want to provide more information on students to share with parents or the business community. Therefore, school-wide projects are often used as the tool to structure a better method for viewing student achievement. If designed correctly, these projects can give a broader view of what a student knows and is able to do that goes beyond the standard course of study or scores received on a single test. (SERVE, 1999, p. 1)

As I pondered the current regiment of testing required of my students, I realized that these standardized testing experiences were not providing a complete view of what my

students knew and were able to do. I desired to furnish students with experiences that revealed what they had learned and what they were able to do. I knew that these experiences could not be standardized and could not be evaluated with students passively sitting in their desks arranged in rows isolated from active involvement with learning. Furthermore, I believed that students needed freedom to question and to insert their own ideas and interests into what they were studying. Often, teenagers struggle with issues but are frequently ignored by adults within society and especially within schools because, according to the autocratic-model of schooling, allowing teenagers to deal with these issues might result in compromising the freedom from disruption in the school setting. While this may be true regarding the manner in which an issue was handled, it did not seem pedagogically sound to reject questions because the topic of the questions was controversial.

I remember an example of freedom being questioned that arose at SEHS during my initial research. Jackie, a student who had objections to the school's new dress code, made an announcement over the intercom to the school one morning. Her announcement concerned Civics Day and the voting process in which students were to be engaged. At the conclusion of Jackie's announcement, she stated over the intercom, "Any student who disagrees with the school's dress code is to come to the cafeteria at this time." Earlier, Jackie had made her intentions about the dress code announcement known to Ms. Covens, an assistant principal at SEHS. Ms. Covens had informed Jackie that if she made the dress code announcement, she would be suspended from school for five days. Jackie made the announcement in spite of the warning about disciplinary consequences. After making the announcement, Jackie told the secretary near the intercom, "I'm ready to take

my punishment." This incident revealed how one student attempted to disrupt the views supporting the school's new dress code. Yet, the manner in which Jackie attempted this disruption also intruded upon classes in which learning was taking place. In addition, Jackie had violated a directive given by an administrator who was attempting to provide the rest of the students and educators with the freedom from intrusion. Hence, Jackie was suspended from school. However, this incident raises an important question. Can schools allow students the freedom to express themselves while also providing freedom from intrusion?

Throughout the nation, schools typically define disruptions as anything that interferes with the learning environment. This vague definition means that school systems may define disruption in different manners. What might be disruptive in one local venue may not be disruptive in another. Yet, it appears that most schools identify drugs, weapons, violence, gangs, and defiance of authority as major forms of disruption. In the case regarding Jackie, if she had felt that she had a more appropriate avenue through which to voice her opinion, would she have taken it? When confronted, she admitted that she did not attend the school board's public meeting concerning the new dress code. Yet, are school board meetings accessible to students—physically, politically, and culturally? As a result of Jackie's actions at school, she was suspended not for her opinion but for her defiance of a school administrator who had warned her not to make the announcement and for the intrusion—the announcement made to the school routine.

Another example of freedom within high schools is journalism classes and school newspapers, which claim to offer opportunities for students to express interest on certain issues. Yet because of issues surrounding censorship, several students who have been

involved with the SEHS newspaper have expressed their disinterest in working on the paper. One act of censorship, to which these students have referred, concerns the censoring of items within the school's newspaper. For example, at SEHS, a cartoon containing the word "darn" was published in an edition of the school's newspaper. This discovery was made after the paper was printed and ready for distribution at school. An administrative decision was made to reprint the paper and destroy the copies, which contained the censored word "darn." It was explained to the students that many people in our community view the word "darn" and the word "damn" as synonymous. The students were even shown in a dictionary that the definition of "darn" is an alternative for "damn." But to many of these students, the explanation was a thin excuse for censoring their freedom of expression.

Likewise, as an assistant principal, I recall having dealt with numerous students who had been sent to my office for making comments such as "This sucks!", "Bite me!", and other slang phrases that are considered vulgar by some adults and some teenagers. Disciplinary action has been handled depending on the context in which the student uttered the phrase. Students often state that they are frustrated with the controls that are placed upon them in school, yet as an administrator, I realize that some of these controls are necessary in providing freedom from intrusion.

When I was a teacher in the classroom, I remember Angela, a student, who in commenting about an assignment said, "This bites!" Immediately, a shocked expression came over Angel's face. Then she stated, "Whew, if I had been in Ms. Slinkers's room, I'd be on my way to the office!" However, I did not see this incident as an intrusion to my class, yet today if a teacher sends a student to my office for a similar incident, I may

assign the student a detention based upon circumstances related to me by the teacher. As I ponder these issues, I am left with the hope that I do not "screw up", which was once considered a vulgar phrase that demanded punishment when I was a high school student.

Let me take you back to when I was a classroom teacher. In the summer of 1997, I was researching initiatives to implement in my English classes for the next school year. I found on the Internet that SERVE was holding a Senior Project Institute in Charlotte, North Carolina. SERVE described Senior Project as a performance-based assessment that was driven by student-initiative. "Senior Project consists of 12th-graders writing research papers on approved topics of their choice, developing products or projects related to their paper topics, and delivering oral presentations before a community review board" (SERVE, 1999, p. 1). Eager to learn more, I registered for the institute. At this institute, I heard students and educators relate their experiences with the Senior Project Program. I was intrigued by the manner in which students were captivated with their studies during the last year of their high school experience. Through the Senior Project program, these educators were taking what was meaningful to their students and using it as the basis that formed an academically rigorous educational experience. According to the educators and students at this institute, high school seniors were motivated to focus upon learning right up to the last week of school. Even though the projects varied in topic selection, the process was still the same: students wrote a research paper on a topic of their choice, extended their research with a project or some form of experience, and then presented the entire experience/research/project/ to a group of adult judges. When I returned to Georgia, I immediately lobbied to teach five twelfth-grade English classes in which I would implement Senior Project.

Before the summer ended, I had an opportunity to change my position as an educator from English teacher to assistant principal at SEHS. Yet, I still believed that students at my school could benefit from what Senior Project offered—an opportunity for authentic assessment based on student initiative, demonstration, and a learning process. Therefore, I recruited an English teacher, Ms. Peabody, to pilot Senior Project with two classes of college preparatory (CP) seniors.

My new position as an administrator has allowed me to support the Senior Project program in a way that I could never have done from the classroom. Yet, it has also created ethical dilemmas with which I daily struggle. Students involved with Senior Project need the freedom to take their educational experiences outside the classroom and at times off school grounds. This is risky from the perspective of an administrator, for I now look at the possibilities for disruptions, intrusions, and for potential problems that could arise when students are engaged in activities without direct supervision from a faculty member. I must also wrestle with the appropriateness of topics that students may choose for their Senior Projects. Do the topics present any risk for injury to the student? Are the topics of such a controversial nature as not to be studied in high school? Will the study of a topic reflect badly upon the school and its reputation? These are just a few of the questions that I ask myself as I review the topics chosen for perspective Senior Projects. Institutional review boards at universities grapple with similar concerns as they consider the merits and appropriateness of research projects in higher education.

At SEHS, each English teacher involved with Senior Project determines whether or not a topic is inappropriate for high school students. If the teacher feels that the topic may be inappropriate, the teacher brings it to my attention. In addition, I review all of the

topics to see if there may be an inappropriate topic that a student has chosen. The final approval of the topics rests with the school's administration. I am the principal's designee in determining whether or not a topic is appropriate for study by our students.

At times, I can make decisions about topics without hesitating. For instance, Billie, a twelfth-grade student, once proposed to study the Ku Klux Klan. Part of the study dealt with the white hooded uniforms worn by Klan members. Billie proposed to make a Klan white hooded uniform and come to Senior Boards dressed in it. I rejected this topic as too racially inflammatory especially given the fact that Billie requested to dress up as a Klan member for his oral presentation at school. Rather than completely censoring the topic, I suggested researching cults including the Ku Klux Klan, but not to focus on one group exclusively and not to dress as a member of that group. As an English teacher who was also the drama advisor, I saw how Billie's original proposal would have been dramatic and could have made a very critical comment about hate groups. But as an administrator, I saw too much possibility for this proposed topic to start major problems among staff, students, and community members especially given our geographical and historical entanglement as a rural southern county. It was my role as an administrator that caused me to redirect Billie's topic, but I am left with the question of "Was this ethically the best decision?"

Other topics that I have had to closely monitor or redirect have included religious groups who conduct sacrificial offerings of animals, school shootings (this was regarding a presentation immediately after the Columbine incident in the spring of 1999), mass murders, and teen pregnancy.

More recently, one topic chosen was tattooing. Our county had recently passed ordinances that do not allow tattoo parlors, and our school has a dress code forbidding the revealing of any tattoo. Therefore, as an administrator, I must monitor this topic selection carefully even though I have had a tattoo since I was eighteen. Topics such as the ones mentioned and many others provide opportunities for students to critically inquire about an issue in which they are interested. This type of study allows students an opportunity to question traditionally held beliefs and even policies that are enforced by the county government and by the board of education. Yet, I also realize that these students are conducting their research within the community and will be presenting their research before a panel of community judges. As an administrator, I must protect the reputation of the school, support the policies of the school board and the county commissioners, as well as ensure that Senior Project continues without being shut down as a result of any controversy that could be created. I also have a duty to protect my students, which means that I will not allow them to stand before community members and present a controversial topic that could end in a bitter confrontation between the student and some community members. Academically, this type of situation could result in lowering that student's grade based upon the score given by the community members. These considerations create ethical quandaries with which I must wrestle and resolve from a perspective that differs from the one I perceived as a teacher from the window of my English classroom.

Consequently, as an administrator, I have been able to support Senior Project from a political standpoint that has taken me to a local Rotary Club where with the assistance of Ms. Peabody, I gave an overview of the program. I have also spoken at other local, state,

and regional meetings where I have also presented the ideology of Senior Project. I have also worked to see that Senior Project has become part of our school improvement plan within our Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation process. The Senior Project program at SEHS now includes, in some form, three English teachers and all twelfth-grade students with the exception of students who are self-contained in special education classes and students who are enrolled in post-secondary option English classes. Post-secondary option (PSO) classes are taught by a professor using the curriculum from a local university. These classes allow students to earn credit at the college level as well as at the high school level. These students are the ones who would typically be enrolled in advance placement classes. The professor and the local university determine the curriculum of these PSO classes.

As an administrator, my position has a direct influence on my views of education and schooling. These views help form the basis from which I begin my research. Therefore, I must acknowledge these views and the fact that I am part of the system of schooling. I also acknowledge that the system of schooling needs to be reworked with a social agenda that often outweighs the agenda held by technicist pedagogy. Yet, my position both as an administrator and as a researcher has led me down a path of reform rather than revolution. These philosophical positions create a dilemma that permeates my study and often creates conflicts that I must grapple with and seek to resolve as I negotiate the pathways of schooling, which will hopefully shed new light on a curriculum and a praxis that is more humane than the standardized system of schooling. I desire to rework our current educational system without destroying the framework in which I labor as an educator-administrator and as an educator-researcher. Therefore, I am tinkering with the

framework of our system of schooling with the hopes of enlarging and reshaping the box in which our educational system exists (Noddings, 1992; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Senior Project is one program that I believe will lead us down a path of reform and revision concerning how we view schooling and how we enact education.

As the Senior Project program grows, a need to research the ideology that supports its curricular goals and pedagogical aspirations has grown. Hence, I am researching Senior Project at SEHS as a performance-based assessment that takes student-initiatives and transforms them into an experiential learning process thus depicting a vital portion of the high school experience. This research continues the efforts of other pedagogues who have sought to utilize student performances as a means of assessing student achievement as well as the achievement of a learning community—a public high school.

There have been studies such as, "The Eight-Year Study" (Akin, 1942), Senior Project research (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994; Combs, 1995; Egelson and Harman, 1998; SERVE, 1999; Summers, 1989), and research conducted by the Coalition of Essential Schools (McDonald, 1993; Sizer, 1985, 1992, 1996) that indicate the importance of the demonstration of knowledge by students through exhibitions, performances, and non-standardized methods. These studies focus on the process of learning through a type of student demonstration that provides a greater understanding of the individual student and school than is provided by reports of standardized test scores.

In addition to the standardized testing regiment, I want to emphasize the processes through which students and teachers interact with personal interests, curricular materials, and pedagogical efforts as opposed to the standardized preparations for testing groups of students. I firmly believe that it is the learning process or experience that is of the utmost

importance, and for too long, the focus in Georgia's public high schools has been on the results obtained on standardized evaluation instruments. As educators, we need to evaluate the whole child, which requires more than standardized evaluations. We must assess the learning processes in which students are engaged. The learning process in which students are engaged presents opportunities for students as well as teachers to become involved in educational experiences that represent more authentic forms of assessment. These educational opportunities provide the freedom to study and exhibit learning in nontraditional avenues around which traditional schooling has detoured.

With this in mind, a critical inquiry of the philosophical and theoretical ideology supporting the Senior Project program has led me to what I believe is my fundamental research question:

> Can Senior Project as implemented in a high school in southeastern Georgia provide students with the freedom to study topics of personal interest and the freedom to exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without violating the freedom from intrusion?

In beginning this study, I acknowledge the influence of progressivism and the research that philosophers and educators have conducted in this area. The dilemma addressed by my research alleges that the emphasis in our schools on standardized assessment and instruction based on the scientific model of curriculum has caused us to ignore more authentic forms of teaching and assessing our students. Student assessment in schools often collides with certain freedoms. Students and educators are supposedly offered freedom from such encumbrances as drugs, violence, and disruption to the educational environment. Yet, are schools providing students and educators with the freedom to initiate and to direct educational experiences without intrusions that erect barriers to critical thought, inquiry, and the formation of knowledge?

As I address the dilemma identified within my study, I raise three fundamental issues that are endemic to the general institution of schooling and specifically to the organization of education within high schools. First, there exists an overemphasis on standardized test scores. Secondly, students rarely are given the freedom within academic settings to explore, investigate, and critically inquire into areas of personal interest in spite of claims that standardized curriculum fosters critical thinking. Thirdly, I believe that a relationship exists between the lack of freedom in schools and the overemphasis on standardized testing. These fundamental issues embody the central problem that my research addresses through a case study that is a critical inquiry of the Senior Project program at SEHS.

Within my study exist limitations that do not negate the study but that suggest the need for further study in this area to broaden the scope of research. My research focuses on a single high school in a specific geographic location. More research on Senior Project and programs similar to it needs to be conducted in other high schools and in other locations. Furthermore, I see that facets of my research could be expanded by other studies that address issues such as the difference between urban, rural, and suburban schools where programs such as Senior Project have been implemented. Additionally, more research into the choices made by students for individual research projects could more specifically inquire into the motivation of students and the choices students make or do not make for bringing human agency into their educational experiences. Undoubtedly, other nuances can be found within my research to suggest more studies into the intricacies of Senior Project. The philosophy of the educator/researcher plays an endemic role in how a particular research project is structured, conducted, and reported. I

acknowledge that my philosophical ideology has had such an influence on my research and upon the pedagogy that I attempt to practice as I daily negotiate educational praxis with colleagues, students, and the schooling community.

Philosophers and educators such as Freire (1970/1993, 1981, 1998), Greene (1988, 1995), and Darling-Hammond (1997, 1998) reveal the differences between the freedom to and the freedom from. Freire's (1998) philosophy that there is no freedom without limits indicates that actions are not truly free from some overriding perspective. I would assert that these overriding perspectives, limits, desires, or urges make us ethical. A dilemma appears to exist between the freedom from and the freedom to. Hence, freedom is a paradox. Many of the freedoms from certain dangerous and intrusive behaviors create a state within schools where routines are not implemented for educating individuals but for monitoring large groups of students and educators who are attempting to act individually. In turn, this creates the standardizing of educational experiences. Certainly, the limits of freedom must prevent intrusions and dangerous behavior, but there must also exist the freedom to express individual interests without intrusions that block critical pedagogy and critical learning. My research will examine how one pedagogical program, Senior Project, provides students with the freedom to direct their individual educational experiences under the guidance of educators, parents and community members.

Accordingly, questions about freedom and social action bring Senior Project into the critical theory arena. In a high school where student-initiated choices drives a type of authentic assessment, the covert assumptions and values of social texts will undoubtedly be an issue. Within the technicist-model of pedagogy, the emphasis is on training students or preparing students for the future. At the high school level, technicist-

pedagogy places a strong emphasis on technology and on preparing students for life after graduation. While preparation for life after high school must remain an important component of high school education, we must do more than just provide students with technical preparations. A portion of this study will examine how pedagogy can liberate students, which is a major component of Paulo Freire's (1993/1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the critical theory he espoused.

My review of the literature focuses on four sections, which include: 1) a philosophical ideology regarding freedom, 2) a theoretical framework focusing on critical theory and critical pedagogy, 3) mandated standardized testing with a focus on the Georgia Department of Education, and 4) alternatives to standardized testing. Section one deals with how my philosophical ideology is entwined with ideas of freedom as found in the writings of Dewey, Freire, Greene, and Darling-Hammond. From the perceptions of these educators and philosophers regarding freedom, I have fashioned my philosophical ideology concerning freedom, which provides a basis for my research on Senior Project. In the introduction to Pedagogy of Freedom (Freire, 1998), Aronowitz asks what freedom means in education. Dewey, Freire, Greene, and Darling-Hammond address the issue of freedom in education and how we need freedom to revolutionize educational experiences within the limits that guarantee freedom from intrusion. I examine freedom in this study from these two different perspectives—freedom from and freedom to.

One perspective of my study deals with a passive freedom or freedom that is received by virtue of being an American or being human. This is the freedom from intrusion, injury, etc. The other perspective requires action or a type of agency. This is

the freedom to learn, to act, to question, to debate, to think, to reason, etc. With this type of freedom comes responsibility to one's self and to society—a sense of agency.

My research is based on the theoretical framework of critical theory from the perspectives of Aronowitz, Giroux, McLaren, and Willis as well as upon the framework of neo-progressivists such as Sizer, Egelson, Ancess, and Darling-Hammond. The works of these theorists and educators provide the theoretical support for my study. "Critical theory refers to both a 'school of thought' and a process of critique" (Giroux, 1983, p. 8). This critical "school of thought" envelops a body of thought that Giroux states is essential for educational theorists. The critique within critical theory is ongoing in that it examines and analyzes the world within the study and the existence of the actual world that may be different from the study. Since conditions within the world and within schooling are changing as society changes, be it ever so slowly, then this critical critique is never finished. As soon as this critique ends, it begins again. Critical theory furnishes the perspective I use to examine the freedoms provided by Senior Project and the potential for disruption that is found in the implementation of Senior Project. Specifically, I refer to what these theorists have written about the hidden curriculum, the reproduction of the dominant society in schooling, the resistance to that dominant society, and the call led by Giroux for critical or radical pedagogy.

The concept of intrusion is embedded within my research question. For my study, intrusion exists as a dual connotation. First as typically defined by the institution of schooling, intrusion is referred to as disruption. According to definitions used by schools, disruption has a negative implication as can be seen in the Code of Conduct from SEHS.

Disruption as defined by school administrators typically focuses on control and on who has the power or authority within the school.

Yet from a critical theory perspective, disruptions can be positive while intrusions are negative. Occasionally, disruptions occur through struggle and resistance that bring about positive changes. On the other hand, critical theorists identify intrusions that create impediments to critical pedagogy and to critical inquiry; thus, such intrusions force themselves on education uninvited to interfere with the processes of teaching and learning.

Hence, my study examines teachers and students in a concrete school setting as they interact and struggle with Senior Project. Senior Project offers students a type of freedom to express individuality and to become less dominated by authoritarian modes of schooling. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) identify how flaws in theories of resistance have led to the failure of examining the insights provided by reproduction theories and the failure to adopt the insights that would help develop a critical pedagogy.

Within my review of the literature, I have given an overview of the philosophies and theories of several pedagogues. These individuals can be separated into two different philosophical and theoretical camps. One camp includes pedagogues who adhere to critical theory and its political implications. The other camp adheres to what might be called neo-progressivists who have their roots in the movement led by educators such as John Dewey at the turn of the century and revisited by contemporary educators such as Darling-Hammond, MacDonald, Sizer, Egelson and Harman. While I admire many of the points made by educators who are in the critical theory camp, it is the ideology of the neo-progressivists that most epitomizes my pedagogical philosophy. Within my review of

the literature, I have given an overview of the philosophies and theories held by critical pedagogues and neo-progressivists. Yet, I acknowledge that the neo-progressivists hold the view that I adhere to in my daily praxis.

Section three in my review of the literature provides an overview and a perspective of how extensive and impersonal standardized assessment is in the state of Georgia. The final section in my review of the literature provides alternatives to standardized testing along with the principles espoused by the Coalition of Essential Schools and research conducted on Senior Project programs.

One component of Senior Project that strives to create collaboration between all members of the schooling community involves a form of mentoring. Students under the mentorship of educators and community members struggle with issues students deem as crucial to their lives and their futures. Senior Project also provides scholarly activities and socially relevant inquiries as well as opportunities for evaluation of the academic process through which students are guided. In allowing students to engage in such an educational exertion, Senior Project enables students, as well as educators, parents, and the community to be involved with what matters in the lives of high school students and in the life of society itself.

My research in this study examines the critical nature of Senior Project as a vehicle for the transformation of schooling into emancipatory educational experiences. Critical thought transforms Senior Project into a political enterprise capable of disrupting the institution of schooling without ignoring the polices of the local board of education and the values of the community. Hence, Senior Project is a curricular project that allows

students, educators, and the schooling community to revise the system of schooling with a type of critical pedagogy

This political activity is more than the rhetoric used by politicians. Schools need political activity that empowers students, educators, and the community to resist the current institutionalization of schooling. Yet, it is crucial that Senior Project and similar pedagogical undertakings do not become legislative mandates that are standardized. For then, such pursuits risk merely reproducing the current modes of schooling called by different names and slipped into different packages. This is the challenge facing those who would attempt to introduce crucial changes in the theory and practice of curriculum studies. The essence of Senior Project creates possibilities for transforming schooling into critical learning. Therefore, my research inquires: "Can Senior Project provide students with the freedom to study topics of personal interest and the freedom to exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without violating the freedom from intrusion?"

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Philosophical Ideology:

Educators and philosophers such as Dewey, Freire, Greene, and Darling-Hammond address the issue of freedom in education and how we need freedom to revolutionize educational experiences within the limits that guarantee freedom from intrusion. The philosophies of these four educators provide a valuable perspective about how freedom is regulated in education and in the schooling process. Briefly, I will provide an overview of how these educators view the concept of freedom within educational settings.

Greene says that freedom is being able to determine for yourself the type of person you ought to be (in Ayers & Miller, 1998). Freedom for students to determine the type of persons they will become must be an integral part of education. Tension is created when students are given the freedom to decide and struggle with their own growth and development. As students struggle with their own ideas of whom they wish to become, educators and schools struggle with their roles in guiding and sometimes dictating the route that students should follow in their educational development. This creates a confrontation over freedom and authority.

For Greene (1988, 1995) there exist two forms of freedom: negative freedom and positive freedom. Negative freedom may be viewed as endowed freedom. In other words, this freedom is bestowed upon individuals. With negative freedom, there is no sense of agency or activism. To many Americans "freedom is still taken to be a given in this

country: to be an American is to be endowed with freedom, whether or not one acts on it or fights for it or does anything with it" (Greene, 1988, p. 26). Negative freedom is the freedom from. This is what institutions such as schools attempt to guarantee—freedom from disruption as defined by the system of schooling. Positive freedom is much different; it is the freedom to (e.g., freedom to decide, to debate, and to question). Unlike negative freedom, positive freedom requires responsibility for the decision or the action taken. Positive freedom places students and educators in positions of struggle and resistance. These struggles and resistances are as much with ideologies and beliefs as they are with people. Positive freedom is the freedom to question, to make decisions, to take risks, to make mistakes, to think, and to formulate new ideas and beliefs. Positive freedom disrupts the technicist pedagogy of schooling that emphasizes standardization. In other words, positive freedom is the freedom to learn and to become actively involved with human agency.

As has been stated, schools attempt to provide freedom from disruptions such as drugs, violence, gangs, threats, and physical intimidation, along with freedom from disruptions to the learning environment. In Georgia, Roy Barnes made freedom from disruptions in schooling a major political plank in his campaign for governor. Once elected, Governor Barnes initiated House Bill 1187, which outlined steps for teachers to follow in having disruptive students removed from the school setting (Georgia Department of Education, 2000). The emphasis was certainly on freedom from disruption, which on the surface appears logical and rational, but by focusing on the disruptive behavior of students who impede pedagogical praxis, little or no emphasis was

placed upon critical learning that causes intellectual disruptions, which question hegemonic control.

Hidden intrusions to critical inquiry not only exist in schools but also serve to exert hegemonic control and serve to embed dominant ideologies within the philosophy of freedom. Schooling neglects to address freedom from exploitation that intrudes upon the formation and acquirement of critical knowledge. Such knowledge is only achieved through sophisticated critical inquiry that frees educators and students to question, to debate, to imagine, and to struggle with freedoms.

Within schooling, hegemonic devices serve to bolster economic commercialism. Greene (1988) states, "Teachers are asked to teach to the end of 'economic competitiveness' for the nation. They are expected to process the young (seen as 'human resources') to perform acceptably on some level of an increasingly systematized world" (p. 12). Greene (1988) goes on to discuss how little is done to "render problematic a reality" that includes injustice and deprivation and that little is done to "counter media manipulation of the young into credulous and ardent consumers" (p. 12)

In Disturbing Pleasures, Giroux (1994) speaks of "schools as sites of capital accumulation." He states, "Schools have become a site of contestation and struggle not only over the construction of a new type of worker/consumer but also over the accumulation of capital itself" (p. 50). Increasingly, corporations have seized an opportunity to capitalize on the buying power of teenagers. This is evident in the amount of money corporations have spent giving materials to schools including free textbooks, computers, etc. for instructional use. Yet, each item given to the school includes advertisements of goods typically purchased by young people. One glaring example of

this is Chris Whittle's creation, Channel One, which provides schools with approximately "$50,000 in free electronic equipment" (Giroux, 1994, p. 53). My school is a Channel One school as are many other high schools throughout the country. The condition attached to the expensive equipment is that each school must daily "broadcast a ten-minute program of current events and news material along with two minutes of commercials" (Giroux, 1994, p. 53). I agree with Giroux that if schools were adequately funded, then bribes from the corporate world would not be attractive.

Such intrusions, by the corporate world, that encumber the critical inquiries of educators and students reveal one way in which critical education is being impeded. According to Giroux (1994), "At risk is both the traditional civic, democratic function of public schooling and the very nature of how we define democratic community, critical citizenship, and the most basic premises of teaching and learning" (p. 51). This intrusion of big business into our schools questions the very identity of schools as public spaces of learning, debate, and inquiry.

In line with the agenda of commercialization, students are being schooled with a philosophy that "human worth depends on the possession of commodities, community status, a flippant way of talking, good looks. What they are made to believe to be the 'news' is half entertainment, half pretenses at being 'windows on the world'" (Greene, 1988, p. 12). Television and fancy marketing techniques have created a society of voyeurs who watch war, struggle, starvation, death, and torture from the isolated comforts of the family room and the classroom. This type of voyeurism has dehumanized the plight of the helpless and the injustices wrought upon powerless victims.

Furthermore, popular culture has embraced voyeurism to the point that Hollywood and advertisers in corporate America have become supporters of this dehumanizing form of entertainment. MTV's Real World, which broadcasts the lives of several strangers as they live together for a few months, has spawned other television shows such as CBS's Survivor, ABC's Making the Band, and CBS's scheduled new show Big Brother. What are viewers of such voyeuristic television learning? Do they really care about the people whose experiences and lives are being exploited? This voyeurism is not much different from news broadcasts that took us into the Gulf War as we watched the destructive downpour of so called "smart bombs" and Allied troops as they captured the enemy. It is not much different than watching footage on the six o'clock news of a cloth draped corpse lying in a pool of blood in the street or of an American soldier whose body was shown being dragged through the streets in Somalia. Viewers experience these events as they watch from their homes the real people who are exploited and dehumanized.

When schools embrace the dehumanization and the exploitation of others, then they are not truly places of freedom. Consequently, our society has been conditioned to passively watch others without getting involved. The dehumanizing of life's experiences has led to the absence of human agency and the furtherance of dehumanizing intrusions into homes and schools.

As a component of society, schools are affected by the voyeuristic and dehumanizing intrusions within our culture and our lives. As Greene (1988) states:

> In the face of all this, school people are asked to increase academic rigor, ensure the preparation of a work force for "high technology," enhance cultural literacy, overcome mediocrity, contain adolescent pregnancies, prevent suicides, educate against AIDS. Confronting some of the most tragic lacks in American society, some of the saddest instances of dehumanization, they offer promises of "career ladders," "board certification," decision-making power...At once, teachers and administrators

> are helped still to see themselves as functionaries in an instrumental system geared to turning out products, some (but not all) of which will meet standards of quality control. They still find measures; and they (seeing no alternatives) are wont to narrow and technicize the area of their concerns. (p. 13)

Within such a setting, schools make it difficult for students and educators to create public spaces where dialogue can occur using the imagination of possibility.

Within this social matrix of schooling that is bound with hegemonic influences of capitalism, intrusions have been made that demand educators to prepare workers. This agenda has turned educators into technicians whose job merely is to train workers and prepare students for further economic exploitation after graduation. Yet, at the same time, students yearn for the freedom of the adult world while their teachers attempt to follow governmental mandates designed to inculcate dominant ideologies concerning capitalism and labor into the curriculum.

Hence, the result is schooling that prepares graduates rather than education that stimulates learning. Schools need to be free from intrusions that impede education; sadly, schools only focus on the freedom from disruptions that would either physically harm students or disrupt the technicist curriculum model. Greene (1998) states:

> Whether or not schools are intentionally controlling and hegemonic as radical critics have said they are, the constant bombardment of official proposals has led to preoccupation with preparing the young for a society that will no longer be an industrial one, but rather one committed to "high technology." (p. 13)

Within schools, few questions are being asked about how technology might challenge the business world to be more humane. The emphasis on preparation with skills, proficiencies, achievements, and techniques appeals to the consumer minded public and parents by "equipping students of all groups to meet current market demand" (Greene, 1998, p. 14). Greene goes on to posit that "children who have been provoked to

reach beyond themselves, to wonder, to imagine, to pose their own questions are the ones most likely to learn to learn" (Greene, 1998, p. 14)

For that reason, a critical pedagogy is needed that creates public spaces for students and their educators to ask questions, debate issues, analyze propaganda, and imagine possibilities. Senior Project naturally embraces such pedagogy. When students are encouraged to search for interests that reveal perplexities within society and within schooling, then these students are being guided into critical inquiry from which they can learn to learn. Therefore, schools need freedom from intrusions that block the freedom to become critical learners investigating the accepted practices of society and schooling that exert hegemonic control over the masses.

In Experience and Education, Dewey (1938/1997b) deals with the nature of freedom. He discusses how some definitions view freedom as merely allowing more extensive physical movement in the classroom. While Dewey asserts that we need more physical movement in the classroom, he acknowledges that this is not the most important type of freedom. "The only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgement exercised on behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worth while" (Dewey, 1938/1997b, p. 61). Physical activity or freedom of movement is not the only type of freedom that schools need to be exercising with students. Dewey states:

> There can be no greater mistake, however, than to treat such freedom as an end in itself. It then tends to be destructive of the shared cooperation activities which are the normal source of order. But, on the other hand, it turns freedom which should be positive into something negative. For freedom from restriction, the negative side, is to be prized only as a means to a freedom which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation. (Dewey, 1938/1997b, pp. 63-64)

Dewey cries out against the modes of schooling that confine freedom of movement to a military regimen with desks and students mustered into rows and columns where appearance, behavior, and educational experiences are standardized. Where, the "only escape from them in the standardized school is an activity which is irregular and perhaps disobedient" (Dewey, 1938/1997b, p. 62).

Without providing the freedom to act properly and to experience education appropriately, are we merely setting up many students to escape the mundane enslavement of schooling by their engagement in activities that are disobedient? At the very least, it would seem that we are creating extreme tension between educational freedom and the authority of schooling. Freire discusses the concepts of freedom and authority not as a dualism in which we either have one or are ruled by the other. Rather, he portrays these concepts as existing in a relationship, in which freedom and authority are dependent upon each other. "[I]t is not possible to have authority without freedom or vice versa" (Freire, 1998, p. 99). Freire describes how in the exercise of freedom we must assume responsibility for our decisions. As freedom matures, it is confronted with various freedoms, which are usually the freedoms or desires of others. At these confrontational points, we have the freedom to decide. Freire argues that even children need to be granted the freedom to decide.

> In my view, it's preferable to emphasize the children's freedom to decide, even if they run the risk of making a mistake, than to simply follow the decision of the parents. It's in making decisions that we learn to decide. (Freire, 1998, p. 97)

This philosophy views the experience as instructional whether or not the child's idea was practical or ridiculous.

Therefore, the consequences of the child's decision allow the decision-making process to become an exercise of responsibility. Parents and educators should not merely make decisions for children; rather, it is the duty of the adult to advise children and to help them analytically speculate about the consequences of their decisions. Adults who assist children in this manner are performing the role of mentors. In regard to Senior Project topic selection, this holds a critical perspective for educators who approve these topics. Students need guidance rather than directives concerning their proposed topics. The process of discussing topics with students can be an educational experience.

The concepts of freedom and authority are ones with which educators and philosophers struggle as they attempt to analyze the roles these concepts play within the institution of schooling. Dewey (1916/1997a) defines three words that are typically used within the institution of schooling in regard to both freedom and authority: direction, control, and guidance. Schools claim to provide direction and guidance for students, and the issue of control is obviously found within the authority of the school over the curriculum, the educators, and of course the students. Dewey (1916/1997a) defines direction as "the basic function, which tends at one extreme to become a guiding assistance and at the other, a regulation or a ruling" (p. 23). Control is defined by Dewey (1916/1997a) as the "notion of an energy brought to bear from without and meeting some resistance from the one controlled" (p. 23). According to Dewey (1916/1997a), guidance is "the idea of assisting through cooperation the natural capacities of the individuals guided" (p. 23).

By comparing Dewey's concepts of direction, control, and guidance with the philosophy of Freire (1994, 1997, 1998), we can see how each of these is needed within

the enterprise of schooling. Yet, guidance incorporates the components that Freire describes as being the most advantageous pedagogical tasks that can be utilized by educators and parents. Guidance requires that adults function in the role of advisors or mentors guiding students and aiding students in analyzing situations so that the best decisions are made. Yet, when students make decisions that are not deemed to be the best by educators or parents, the student should be allowed to make the less than best decision. By doing so, the student will learn from the process and from guided analysis of why the decision was not the best one based upon the consequences.

The question quickly arises regarding whether or not an educator should allow a student to make a choice that could result in personal injury to the student or to others. This is where I see Freire's concept of freedom with limits revealing its importance.

> Freedom without limit is as impossible as freedom that is suffocated or contracted. If it were without limit, it would take me outside of the sphere of human action, intervention, or struggle. Limitless freedom is a negation of the human condition of unfinishedness. (Freire, 1998, p. 96)

The limits of my freedom cause me to be aware of my actions, of my responsibility for intervention in the lives of those who are oppressed by injustices, and of the struggles that we all face in the human condition of unfinishedness. In other words, my freedom reminds me of my responsibilities. If limitless freedom did exist, then it would be blind to the conditions of others.

In the implementation of Senior Project, students must have their topics approved, which allows educators the opportunity to provide guidance. Approval does not equal guidance unless the approval process includes a discussion, in which the student has a voice that is part of the approval process. If a student chooses a topic that is deemed inappropriate for study, then educators can discuss and analyze the topic's

inappropriateness with the student. This may result in the student changing the topic or modifying the topic so that it is appropriate.

An example of guiding a student to make a decision that reflected an awareness of responsibility occurred with a young man who had chosen pyrotechnics as a topic for his Senior Project. As soon as I saw his topic listed, a red flag went up in flames within my mind. I discussed this with the student, and he explained about his plans to research this topic and to experience the research by staging and recording on videotape an explosion in a field behind his parent's house. Just the thought of such an activity sent shock waves through my being. I suggested alternative ways to approach his topic. The student and I discussed researching the safety aspects of pyrotechnics and possibly spending a day with a local fire department. We also discussed engineering aspects of pyrotechnics such as exploding bolts used in spacecraft and in the ejection seats on aircraft; it was suggested that the student could spend the day at Gulfstream Aerospace, a local aircraft manufacturer. These were just a few suggestions discussed with the student about how his topic could be researched and experienced appropriately as well as safely. Finally, this student decided to go ahead with his research of pyrotechnics, but he decided to join a local volunteer fire department as part of his experience in learning how fiery explosions are handled safely. Throughout this interchange of ideas with this young man, I had to be aware of his choice for his Senior Project, of the responsibility that his parents have placed upon the school for his safety, and of the appropriateness of this educational endeavor for this student and for other students within this program.

Agency must be tied to any ideology regarding freedom. "Without the consciousness of agency, no human being is likely to take the initiative needed for the achievement of

freedom" (Greene, 1988, p. 36). The human consciousness of agency is what causes us to visualize our unfinished state and causes us to work diligently toward reaching a better life and a better society. Freedom that stimulates the human conscious to recognize the state in which our children and we live is the type of freedom that will liberate schooling from the bonds of mandates so that everyone within our schools can experience education. We need to acknowledge the unfinished state in which we dwell and in which our society exists. Greene (1998) calls for us to become restless in our current conditions and to break free as we reach for possibilities that await us on the horizon.

> Visible or invisible, the world may not be problematized; no one aches to break through a horizon, aches in the presence of the question itself. So there are no tensions, no desires to reach beyond.
>
> There is an analogy here for the passivity and the disinterests that prevent discoveries in classrooms that discourage inquiries that make even reading seem irrelevant. It is not simply a matter of motivation or interest. In this context, we can call it a question having to do with freedom or, perhaps, the absence of freedom in our schools. By that I do not necessarily mean the ordinary limits and constraints, or even the rules established to ensure order. I mean, in part, the apparent absence of concern for the ways in which young people feel conditioned, determined, even fated by prevailing circumstances. (Greene, 1988, p. 124)

Greene depicts how we should be concerned about our schools in such a way that we ache to break through the mundane practices that plague our schools and our young people. Volumes have been written about the state of American education; politicians continually rave about the condition of our schools; and the media habitually reports on the low ranking arbitrarily given our schools. Yet, this rhetoric concerning schooling has not, as Greene writes, broken through the horizon or shown a genuine concern for "the ways in which young people feel conditioned, determined, even fated by prevailing circumstances" (Greene, 1988, p. 124). Freedom places upon those in possession of it the responsibility to ensure that others, especially our children, also possess such freedom.

The implications for pedagogical ventures are numerous when educators begin to analyze their freedoms and the freedoms which we want our children to experience as they grow and learn. "[I]t is hard to conceive of a set of educational purposes that does not include a concern for human freedom and sense of agency in the face of a more and more controlled and administered world" (Greene, 1995, p. 178).

In such a manner, critical pedagogy acts from a standpoint to inculcate students with critical thought as they interact with each other and with the world in which we struggle. Greene's (1995) view of freedom and agency addresses the interaction between people that freedom demands. Her view is worth noting here.

> Freedom is an achievement in the midst of life and with other human beings. People achieve whatever freedom they can achieve though increasingly conscious and mindful transaction with what surrounds and impinges, not simply by breaking out of context and acting in response to impulse or desire. And it seems clear that most people find out who they are only when they have developed some power to act and to choose in engagements with a determinate world. (Greene, 1995, p. 178)

The concept of freedom only takes shape when we interact with others. The belief of freedom read about in textbooks reveals lofty ideals held by heroic, historical figures. Yet, it is when we, educators and students, interact with one another in life's situations that freedom becomes more than a belief. Human interaction and the concept of freedom require that we deal with personal impulses or desires as we encounter the impulses and desires of others.

Hence, a relationship between authority and freedom creates a permanent tension or resistance between self-discipline and being undisciplined (Freire, 1998). To truly be free is to practice self-discipline rather than to be undisciplined. Self-discipline can be hegemonically influenced by the society of schooling. Yet, within a critical pedagogy, students are challenged to find their own voice and their own directions even if this is

contrary to agendas that reproduce the culture of schooling and the dominant culture of our society. Hence, the very nature of freedom stirs tensions within us to the point that we struggle with ethical dilemmas that can only arise if we are captivated by the ideology of freedom. Freire (1998) states "coherent democratic authority recognizes the ethical basis of our presence in the world and necessarily recognizes that it is not possible to live ethically without freedom and that there is no such thing as freedom without risk" (p. 87). Freedom to choose, to question, to debate, to participate, to act, to ignore, to comply, to resist, to be human is what thrusts each of us into ethical quandaries.

Dewey (1972) makes the distinction between psychological terms and social terms within all ethical theory. People act as individuals, yet their actions are not free from some effect upon society. "Society is a society of individuals and the individual is always a social individual" (Dewey, 1972, p. 55). Individuals and society do not exist in opposition to each other, and they are certainly not separated from each other. A casual reading of Dewey's essays may give the reader the idea that Dewey advocates the reproduction of society, yet this is not the case if we read with a more critical insight than that of a casual reader. Dewey (1972) speaks of the pathological nature of schooling, which occurs when emphasis is placed upon conformity to rule, routines, and regulations. Our pedagogy is pathological when "the stress comes to be laid upon correcting wrongdoing instead of upon forming habits of positive service" (Dewey, 1972, p. 62). Dewey, Freire, and Greene all recognize that humans are social beings who exist as part of a society. Therefore, the freedom to learn and to act upon that learning creates ethical responsibilities. These ethical responsibilities require that educators and students learn to form habits of positive service out of a sense of human agency.

Educators who seek to cultivate critical thought within their students are faced with ethical questions daily. One of the greatest questions that educators, who grapple with the issue of freedom, are asked deals with limits. Freire (1998) wrestles with these notions and comments about the challenges they present.

> The great challenge for the democratic-minded educator is how to transmit a sense of limit that can be ethically integrated by freedom itself. The more consciously freedom assumes its necessary limits, the more authority it has, ethically speaking, to continue to struggle in its own name. (Freire, 1998, p. 96)

Freedom embraces limits, for it is through these limits that human agency becomes a part of our pedagogical creed. This sense of agency places us within ethical straits where we can navigate toward a better world for ourselves and for others. Within this type of pedagogy, students learn that it is not all about me—the teacher or me—the student. They learn that we, together, must cooperate and collaborate in efforts that benefit each of us. At times, the efforts will benefit others more than they do me, yet at other times these efforts will provide me with what I need to achieve my goals. How can this type of educative object, aim, or goal be measured on a standardized-testing instrument? Lessons of freedom that cultivate personal and social agency are ones that demand quality interactions with human beings in situations created through encounters with life.

Dewey (1916/1997a) addresses freedom in school as the ability of students to contribute as individuals to the larger group. "But the essence of the demand for freedom is the need of conditions which will enable an individual to make his own special contribution to a group interest" (Dewey, 1916/1997a, p. 301). This appears to be similar to the agency of which Greene and Freire have referred. Dewey addresses the personal agency for the individual, but it would seem that when the individual contributes to a group interest that there is a type of social agency as well. Dewey comments on social

guidance becoming part of a student's mental attitude rather than being dictated to by some authority. The essence of freedom is internalized when individuals are guided by the needs of society. This is the freedom to make a difference, the freedom to help achieve a higher standard of living not just economically but intellectually and spiritually. This is social agency, and students must become aware of this without being forced to engage in community service. Students need to learn what they can do to help others, and then they need to be intrinsically motivated to act. This type of pedagogy focuses on the learner; in other words, it is learner-centered, which requires a great deal of freedom to be exercised on both the part of the teacher and the part of the student.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) calls for schools to become centered on more than learning; they need to become centered on the learner. Hence, schools need to be "deliberately organized to attend to the varied developmental and cognitive needs emerging from students' differing experiences, talents, learning styles, language backgrounds, family situations, and beliefs about themselves and what school means for them" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 32). Schools with a pedagogy that is learner-centered are schools that practice freedom to learn from the various modalities and experiences that present themselves through the daily lives of the students. Standardized pedagogical efforts not only enslave students to rigid forms of schooling they also enslave teachers to similar rigid instructional techniques. Thus, academic freedom for educators becomes a glimmer from the distant past. The differences between students become homogenized to the point that students become faceless test-takers whose names are replaced by percentile rankings.

Darling-Hammond (1997) adeptly cautions that the type of freedom that creates learner-centered schools is not the chaotic freedom of everyone doing his/her own thing. She seems to embrace Freire's concept of freedom with limits. "Active learning aimed at genuine understanding begins with the disciplines, not with whimsical activities detached from core subject matter concepts as some critics of hands-on learning suggest, and it treats disciplines as alive not inert" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, pp. 107-108). Within this type of pedagogy, students are free to search for understanding as they are engaged with the type of work done by artists, musicians, writers, scientists, mathematicians, and critics in real world contexts (Darling-Hammond, 1997). These students and their teachers break free from the constraints of test-driven curriculum and search for ways to grasp understanding so that through their educational experiences the spirit of wonderment stimulates the freedom to learn.

Curriculum based upon freedom is built from the interests and needs of the students rather than from the answers on the standardized-testing instrument. Opponents of curriculum that takes its starting point from students' interests voice concerns about the appropriateness and the academic rigor with which students' interests can be utilized within curriculum planning. There may be problems encountered in regard to this, but these problems can be handled with careful planing. "Whereas starting and ending with students' immediate interests does not create deeper understanding, careful use of standards and scaffolding can push students from intuitive understanding and interested engagement to more intellectually principled and technically skilled performance" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 110). Thus, in my view, Darling-Hammond provides a middle ground, in which standards are utilized as a component in a process that

stimulates students to exercise personal interest and curiosity as a point from which to devise educational endeavors and to devise a critical pedagogy.

Like Darling-Hammond, Freire (1998) acknowledges the need to push students toward deeper understanding and greater academic rigor than may be obtained by merely allowing students to freely incorporate their interests into what is taught in the classroom.

> A proper democratic and pedagogical environment in which to work is one in which the learners progress in learning through their actual experiences and one in which curiosity as an expression of freedom necessarily has limits, limits that are being constantly called into being. Limits that are ethically integrated by the learner. (Freire, 1998, p. 80)

When I think of my earliest days as a student in school, I remember the curiosity that motivated me to question, to read, to investigate, and to learn. I also remember that this curiosity was greater when I was in the primary grades than it was when I reached secondary schooling. Are children filled with greater curiosity because they have more to learn than teenagers and adults? Or, does the process of schooling teach students that there is no time for curiosity unless it is something that will be scored on a standardized-test? When considering the hidden curriculum within schools and the manner in which educational experiences can unteach the lessons with which students have been indoctrinated by the institution of schooling, we must help students become inquiring learners. Young children are often inquiring learners, yet as they progress through the graded levels of schooling, they learn how to behave as passive and thoughtless beings within these public institutions (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994). It is crucial in the process of schooling that both educators and students recognize that "open, curious questioning, whether in speaking or listening, is what grounds them mutually—not a simple passive pretense at dialogue. The important thing is for both the teacher and

students to assume their epistemological curiosity" (Freire, 1998, p. 81). I agree with Freire that curiosity is what makes me ask questions, seek knowledge, take action, ask more questions, and reach for understanding.

Freire calls for educators to encourage their students to experience spontaneous curiosity. This type of curiosity leaps out from the interests of the students. It is what made men and women wonder about the possibility of human flight, or consider the arrangement of color and sound to form works of art, or ponder the curing of disease, or wonder about forms of injustice. Curiosity is what causes children to ask why or at times to ask why not? This is spontaneous curiosity; the type of curiosity that causes us to say, "I wonder...." Freire (1998) identifies one of the fundamental types of knowledge as "that which stresses the need for spontaneous curiosity to develop into epistemological curiosity" (p. 83). This is where the academic rigor is added. Students must have more than the freedom to wonder about their interest and more than an opportunity to take superficial looks into issues that captivate them.

Hence, educators must allow students the freedom to bring individual interests into the curriculum. "The curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought, as a vigorous and healthy body is on the *qui vive* for nutriment" (Dewey, 1910/1997c, p. 31). But, educators must also move students into the realm of epistemological curiosity. This requires that students obtain more than a mechanical memorization of facts about something in which they are interested.

> The construction or the production of knowledge of the object to be known implies the exercise of curiosity in its critical capacity to distance itself from the object, to observe it, to delimit it, to divide it up, to close in on it, to approach it methodically to make comparisons, to ask questions. (Freire, 1998, p. 80)

Students who begin to inquire about topics should be shown how to take their spontaneous curiosity to the level of epistemological curiosity. This will require skills that we currently teach in school without attaching them to the interest of the students. These skills require observation, research, note taking, writing, interviewing, cooperation and collaboration, inventiveness, perseverance, and a list of other skills that cannot be quantified and scored on a standardized evaluation instrument, nor can the educational experiences be standardized, in tying these skills to the interests and curiosity of students. Hence, part of educational freedom is the freedom to be curious and the freedom to have someone assist in expanding that spontaneous curiosity into rigorous epistemological curiosity.

Dewey (1916/1997a) states, "New receptiveness follows upon new curiosity, and new curiosity upon information gained" (p. 208). When curiosity is whetted, then individuals begin to obtain new knowledge about something of interest to them. This is the means that can be used to move students from spontaneous curiosity to epistemological curiosity, which can be utilized in educational experiences.

> Normally every activity engaged in for its own sake reaches out beyond its immediate self. It does not passively wait for information to be bestowed which will increase its meaning; it seeks it out. Curiosity is not an accidental isolated possession; it is a necessary consequence of the fact that an experience is a moving, changing thing, involving all kinds of connections with other things. Curiosity is but the tendency to make these conditions perceptible. It is the business of educators to supply an environment so that this reaching out of an experience may be fruitfully rewarded and kept continuously active. (Dewey, 1997/1916, p. 209)

This does not mean that we as educators should abandon curriculum and instruction while we wait for the interest or curiosity of students. We need to integrate the interests of students into all subject areas, so their spontaneous curiosity becomes a place from which to engage students in learning experiences. These learning experiences need to be

designed in such a way as to move students from spontaneous curiosity into epistemological curiosity.

Possibly, subjects, even at the high school level, could be taught in a manner similar to what is utilized in many elementary schools. This would require teachers to be generalists first and specialists second. (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1999). Why should high school students be forced to do only science in the science class, math in the math class, history in the history class, English in the English class, and hands-on activities in vocational classes? We could call for integrating subject areas in the high school curriculum. But integrating implies mixing parts into a whole, and this is not what we need in schools. We need to teach subjects the way they are lived in the world outside of the school. We need to allow the natural interaction between subject areas. We could still have math class, science class, history class, English class, and all of the other classes, but within each of these classes, teachers and students would be engaged with life.

In other words, all of the subject areas should be taught, reinforced, investigated, and utilized by all teachers and by all students regardless of the departmental divisions that have been artificially imposed upon the process of schooling. For instance, students who use mathematical skills in analyzing data obtained from surveys or in determining dimensions for a proposed structure or in determining how much fertilizer to order for the athletic fields have an opportunity to place the obtainment of mathematical skills with something that peaks their interests. The challenge for educators is to find ways through which to merge student interest with the concepts and skills that we are required to teach our students. The concepts should first be introduced in the specific class (e.g., math,

science, history, English, etc.). Then, these concepts can be brought to life in all classes as all teachers encourage, guide, and teach students to use these concepts in developing the skills that we are required to teach students. When these concepts and skills are taught in conjunction with students' interests, an educational experience can develop that will make learning come alive and motivate students.

For example, a math teacher at SEHS has her students go to the chemistry lab where they make ice cream. The lesson is highly structured, and the students learn to use various computational formulas as they prepare their ice cream. Likewise, one of the science teachers at SEHS, has her chemistry students make lollipops using equations and principles taught in class. These are just two examples of how a lesson can stimulate curiosity within students. There are many other lessons that do the same in regard to curiosity. We just need to be sure that the curiosity of the students provokes epistemological curiosity.

For instance, this was accomplished in one of the civics classes at SEHS. The teacher led the students in a lesson about civic duty and governmental responsibility during natural disasters. During this time, a hurricane ripped up the east coast and left many in North Carolina in need of assistance. The students organized a fundraiser that resulted in a large check being donated to the Hurricane Relief Fund of the Red Cross. This was a small beginning for these students and this teacher. Sending money was only a beginning of social agency. If this beginning also becomes the end, then all we do is ease our conscience and absolve our responsibility for the society in which we live. But if through activities such as a Red Cross fundraiser, students become more socially active within their society, then we have the beginnings of social agency within educational

experiences. When students become curious and are stimulated by caring educators, the students can do more than reach epistemological curiosity. They can experience the freedom of human agency.

Finally, educational freedom includes both the freedom from and the freedom to. We all want our schools to be free from such things as violence, drugs, gangs, and disruptions. Yet, some disruptions are educational and should not be administratively removed from schools. Forms of disruption may occur when students are free to ask questions, seek knowledge, take action, ask more questions, reach for understanding, and stretch their intellectual abilities. At times, these two types of freedom may seem to be at odds with each other, yet a critical pedagogy will utilize both types of freedom in designing the most appropriate, stimulating, and challenging educational experiences for students. These experiences will defy efforts of standardization. Consequently, these carefully designed experiences will fit the needs of students and educators, which will result in a critical pedagogy that is educational rather than procedural.

Theoretical Framework

On this philosophy of freedom, I layer a theoretical framework for my research based on the theoretical framework of critical inquiry from the perspectives of Aronowitz, Giroux, McLaren, Willis, Sizer, MacDonald, Elegson, Harman, Kessler, Ancess, and Darling-Hammond. The works of these theorists and educators provide the theoretical support for my study. The critique within critical inquiry is ongoing in that it examines and analyzes the world within the study and the existence of the actual world that may be different from the study. Critical theory furnishes a portion of the perspective I use to examine the freedoms provided by Senior Project and the potential for disruption

that is found in the implementation of Senior Project. As I delve into the world of critical theorists, I am reminded that I do not utilize critical theory as a basis from which to launch an overthrow of the system of schooling. For this reason, some might say that I do not embrace critical theory. But, I believe that there are components of critical theory that provide a theoretical framework from which to reform, revise, or tinker with schooling.

A crucial element of my critical study within this high school is the element of the hidden curriculum. Giroux (1983) states, "[C]ritiques of the hidden curriculum have provided modes of analysis that uncover the ideologies and interests embedded in the message systems, codes, and routines that characterize classroom life" (p. 72). While Giroux acknowledges the importance of this type of analysis and uncovering of hidden ideologies and interests, he states that there is lacking "a systematic account of how power and human agency interconnect to promote social practices in schools that represent both the condition and the outcome of domination and contestation" (Giroux, 1983, p. 72).

As I have stated, disruption has a dual connotation. As typically defined by the institution of schooling, disruption has a negative implication as can be seen in the Code of Conduct from SEHS. Rule two in the 1999-2000 SEHS Student Code of Conduct deals with disruption and interference with school. This rule has six subsections. The punishments for violations of this rule can progress from detentions to expulsion and referral to law enforcement agencies. The following subsections of rule two from the 1999-2000 SEHS Student Code of Conduct provide a valuable insight into how the institution of schooling attempts to provide students and educators with the freedom from disruptions.

Rule 2: DISRUPTION AND INTERFERENCE WITH SCHOOL
NO STUDENT SHALL:
2-A. Block any entrance, occupy any school building, prevent any class or function from taking place, prevent any student, guest, or employee from using the facilities, or block any normal pedestrian or vehicular traffic path or otherwise deprive others of free access to, or use of, any facility, program, or activity associated with Salzburg County Schools.
2-B. Set fire to or in any school building or property.
2-B-1. Cause a false alarm.
2-C. Continually and intentionally make noise or act in any manner as to interfere seriously with a teacher's ability to conduct class.
2-D. In any manner, by the use of violence, force, coercion, threat, intimidation, fear, passive resistance, or any other conduct, intentionally cause the disruption of any lawful mission, process or function of the school, or engage in any such conduct for the purpose of causing the disruption or obstruction of any such lawful mission, process, or function.
2-E. Refuse to identify oneself or give false identity upon request of any teacher, administrator, superintendent, school bus driver, or other authorized school personnel.
2-F. Urge, encourage, or counsel other students to violate any of the preceding paragraphs of this rule. [This rule has been quoted with the omission of its disciplinary consequences and with the pseudonym of Salzburg County substituted for the actual name of the county.] (Salzburg Estates High School, 1999, pp. 6-7)

This rule regarding disruptions within the school, its functions, activities, and programs reveals the legalistic attempts of schools to provide a disruptive-free learning environment. In striving to provide a school environment that is relatively free from disruptions, institutions of schooling compose rules that elaborate specifically on the negative aspects of disruptions.

As an assistant principal, I have been charged with ensuring that my school is free from such disruptions. In fact, my duties and responsibilities include enacting disciplinary consequences for those individuals who cause such disruptions within the school. Peter Adams (1996) describes how educators have lost ground to the "anarchists, those individuals who interfere in the lives of students and who disrupt the education

process" (p. 142). Adams provides a picture of school systems that have lost control over individuals who disrupt graduation ceremonies and who threaten students in the hallways.

Furthermore, Adams states, "As a group, those who disrupt the educational routine are far more important than the issues debated between conservative and liberals regarding the nature of content material" (p. 143). These disruptions are viewed as negative impediments with the act of schooling, and the disrupters command more of the school system's energy than does critical analysis of the pedagogy within the schools. Yet, are there types of disruptions that can have positive effects upon educational experiences? Can a particular type of disruption draw a focused attention to the educational experiences within a school?

Disruption as defined by school administrators typically focuses on control and on who has the power or authority within the school. Yet from a critical theory perspective, disruptions can be positive as well as negative. Occasionally, disruptions occur through struggle and resistance that bring about positive changes. This has been true throughout our society. As pointed out by Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), both conservative and critical educators have not seriously examined the manner in which schools function as political sites in repressing and in reproducing culture along with maintaining status-quo power.

> Power is something that either works through the curriculum in a way that goes unquestioned, specifically as it defines what counts as legitimate forms of school knowledge, or is seen as a negative instance of social control that represses the possibilities for struggle and resistance. (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 139)

With this perspective of power, we can grasp another definition of disruption; one that allows for critical thought, struggle, resistance, and education that is transformative. From a critical standpoint, it is this type of freedom to resist and to struggle with ideas,

concepts, and even with rules and procedures that can create positive disruptions. Thus, disruptions of this nature can lead to positive changes within ideologies, theories, structures, and practices. This takes us back to my research question of whether or not Senior Project provides students with the freedom to appropriately study topics of personal interest as well as the freedom to exhibit dissatisfaction with traditional schooling.

From a critical theory standpoint, we must question who decides what is appropriate. If this decision is made entirely by the institution of schooling, then, from a critical view, the current school and societal cultures will be reproduced without any significant changes. Yet, if everyone within the school community is allowed to voice opinions on what is appropriate, and if those opinions form the definition of appropriateness, then transformative, educational experiences that do not serve merely to reproduce the current culture of schooling will undoubtedly occur. In this study, I analyze the political possibilities of Senior Project to emancipate the intellect and creativity of students and teachers within the authoritarian-political governance of the school. If Senior Project does emancipate the intellect and creativity of students and teachers, then does this allow an appropriate type of disruption to the traditional schooling apparatus? And, does this type of disruption transform educational experiences in a positive manner?

Critical theorists have studied the reproduction of culture in society and examined the theories of reproduction (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Giroux, 1981, 1983, 1997; Giroux & Simon, 1989; McLaren, 1980, 1986/1999, 1994; Willis, 1980). Schools reproduce the dominant culture of the society in which they operate, yet these reproduction theories do not offer the means for "self-creation, mediation, and resistance"

(Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 71). This is a major shortcoming in theories of reproduction.

> By downplaying the importance of human agency and the notion of resistance, reproduction theories offer little hope for challenging and changing the repressive theories of schooling. By ignoring the contradictions and struggles that exist in schools, these theories not only dissolve human agency, they unknowingly provide a rationale for not examining teachers and students in concrete school settings. Thus, they miss the opportunity to determine whether there is a substantial difference between the existence of various structural and ideological modes of domination and their actual unfolding and effects. (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 71)

My study examines teachers and students in a concrete school setting as they interact and struggle with Senior Project. The Senior Project process is one in which students are offered a type of freedom to express their individuality and to become less dominated by authoritarian modes of schooling. By choosing topics for research, students are free to examine the very settings in which they are studying—schools. Students can choose to study dress codes, search and seizure policies, censorship, and other school policies that dominate their lives. They can examine topics that lead to social activism and topics that have the power to transform students' lives.

Students are constantly told that certain concepts are inappropriate for schoolwork. This applies to questioning authority and the policies furthered by that authority. Thus, can a student choose a topic for a Senior Project that questions authority and school policy? In doing so, is the student guaranteed political defeat by way of censorship or by way of a lower grade? These questions cut to the ideological cores of the classroom teachers, the school administrators, the school system, and the dominant social powers that influence schooling.

State operated institutions such as schools perform the self-serving function of replicating devices for society, culture, and the politics of that society. Within schooling,

this social replication is engrained as a type of hidden curriculum in the day to day operations that have become routine and accepted as part of the schooling experience.

> We have also seen the development of historical and sociological accounts of the way in which the structure of the workplace is replicated through daily routines and practices that shape classroom social relations, that is, the hidden curriculum of schooling. More recently, we have accounts of schooling that illuminate how cultural resources are selected, organized, and distributed in schools so as to secure existing power relations (Giroux, 1983, p. 4)

In spite of calls for academic freedom and intellectual activities that are permeated with critical thinking skills, our children attend schools that serve not as seedbeds of academic freedom nurtured by critical inquiry. Unfortunately, schools have become institutionalized into clinics that clone dominant ideologies without questioning why.

The replicating of society and culture within our schools appears to be dependent upon the reproduction of knowledge, abilities, beliefs, and values that support a common culture. Giroux (1983) acknowledges that the concept of the hidden curriculum contains definitions that conflict with one another, yet he states:

> [T]he definitional thread that runs through all of these analyses defines the hidden curriculum as those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life. (Giroux, 1983, p. 47)

In addition, the redefinition of the hidden curriculum is central in developing curriculum theory. The hidden curriculum must utilize the ability to analyze social relationships and the classroom as well as other elements such as the silences and ideological messages, which in turn give shape and form to our schools.

> It is critical that the notion of the hidden curriculum be linked to a notion of liberation, grounded in the values of personal dignity and social justice. As such, the essence of the hidden curriculum would be established in the development of a theory of schooling concerned with both reproduction and transformation. (Giroux, 1983, p. 61)

This theory would have a central focus of joining approaches to human consciousness and action to structural analysis in an effort to explore how they are intertwined together rather than existing as separate pedagogical concerns (Giroux, 1983).

Additionally, when individuals, students and teachers, are given symbolic power without political power their resistance only ends up reinforcing the dominant group. "On one level, this is due to the partially realized and often contradictory elements of resistance employed by students (not to mention teachers)" (Giroux, 1981, p. 30). While on a psychological level, "the objective structures of oppression reproduce themselves in the internalized dispositions and needs of human actors, i.e. students and teachers alike" (Giroux, 1981, p. 30). Thus, it would seem that a critical approach to resistance in schools will be difficult to initiate since oppressed groups often have internalized beliefs that keep them subordinate to the dominant qualities within schooling and the larger society. Hence when given the opportunity to resist, individuals may be hesitant to do so either because they do not believe they have the right to resist, or they believe that the power given them is more symbolic than political. In other words, these individuals may believe that resistance is futile.

In defining resistance, I began to realize that the definition used depends upon the perspective of the definer. Resistance is a noun with meanings that fall into what appears to be three distinctive categories. Each category has its own implications that support a slightly different defining of the term resistance. According to Webster's Dictionary (1984), one of the categories under which resistance can be defined deals with a passive type of resistance; these definitions reveal resistance as an obstacle, a blockage, or an

impediment that holds back and prevents progression. A second category focuses upon active resistance. From this perspective, resistance is fighting back, making a stand, and protecting. This type of active resistance may involve insubordination through insurgency and underground or unauthorized actions. Another category for resistance definitions reveals a detached involvement. These definitions center upon qualities of durability, imperviousness, endurance, and permanence. Depending upon the situation and upon the perspective of the definer, resistance can be seen as either positive or negative. At times, resistance can be an impediment that blocks, while at other times resistance can be an active force that is capable of striking back, or resistance can be the quality that enables survival through endurance. Each of these perspectives has slightly different implications for schooling depending upon who is using the definition and for what purpose the definition is to be used.

Passive resistance may be seen as a lack of motivation or an "I don't care attitude." Yet, this type of behavior must be analyzed by educators from a perspective of resistance and not merely brushed aside as symptoms found in students who are not motivated. Willis (1980) saw this type of resistance in the lads with whom he worked in Hammertown.

Forms of active resistance reveal dual meanings that are dependent upon the understanding of the resistance. The authorities with which the resisters actively struggle typically see these actions as insubordination, which is synonymous with disturbance, revolt, dissension, sedition, and mutiny. From the perspective of those in authority, acts of this nature are paramount to treason, which is the ultimate violation against the group or nation. On the other hand, those who actively engage in resistance often understand

their acts as heroic and their missions as filled with valor. To the French in World War II, the Resistance was led by brave men and women who have been immortalized as heroes. To the authorities in France during World War II, anyone working with the Resistance could be executed as a traitor. The same could be said of the American Revolutionary patriots. During the Vietnam War, resistance to the war in the form of protests was viewed as lawless disruptions by the established authorities of society. On occasion, these peaceful protests met with violent reactions from the authoritarian-political powers as was evident at Kent State and in other graphic examples. More recently, the freedom fighters in Nicaragua symbolized resistance, and how they were viewed symbolized the different perceptions society holds about resistances. Again, the perception determines the definition used.

Resistance that falls into the category of endurance or survival may not rebel against authority or passively resist by obstructing progress as defined by the authorities, but this type of resistance may appear to submit while remaining impenetrable to the ideologies and concepts of the dominant group. This type of resistance typically does not disrupt the procedures of a school, but educators must analyze compliant behavior with an understanding of how it could be a form of resistance. Educators must analyze whether or not compliant behavior within schools results in experiences that foster critical analysis of the experience, and they must analyze the effects of the experience on the individual and upon society. This will allow students the opportunity to form a picture in which they see themselves and their roles within society.

The many forms of resistance include behavior that may be aggressive and overtly disruptive while others are passive and covertly disruptive. In Schooling as a Ritual

Performance, McLaren (1986/1999) examines school resistance by using Victor Turner's term "social drama" (p. 148). One form of social drama that includes a type of resistance is the enactment of carnival. Similar to tribal initiation rituals, carnival includes the setting aside of customs, laws, mores, taboos and a loosening of the customary manners that typify the culture. In this setting, the bizarre becomes normal and creates "topsy-turveydom, parody, abrogation of the normative system, exaggeration of rule into caricature or satirizing of rule" (Turner, 1982, p. 42). Turner is describing typical initiation rituals from which carnival takes many of its ceremonious chaos and revelry. "But one thing must be kept in mind—all these acts and symbols are of obligation. Even the breaking of the rules has to be done during initiation" (Turner, 1982, p. 42). Within initiation rituals, this chaos, this lawless rule breaking is required behavior of every novice who is being initiated. Turner (1982) explains the differences between initiation rituals and carnival:

> Here, again, optation is evidently dominant—for people do not have to act invertedly—as in tribal rituals; some people, but not all people, chose to act invertedly at the carnival. And the carnival is unlike the tribal ritual in that it can be attended or avoided, performed or merely watched, at will. It is a genre of leisure enjoyment, not an obligatory ritual, it is play separated from work, not play-and-work ludergy as a binary system of man's serious communal endeavor. (p. 43)

Unfortunately, children and teenagers today do not have such initiation rituals or passages from childhood into adulthood. Our children are lacking the ceremonious experiences that also serve to educate the novice as s\he traverses the treacherous terrain between immaturity and maturity. Hence, the revelry of the carnivalesque events is the only opportunity for our children to resist order and experiment with the new feelings and pending responsibilities that we keep telling them are just around the bend in life's road. Therefore, the carnival becomes a release and a superficial ritual or passage to adulthood.

Other scholars note the absences of rites of passage within our society. The void left by such an absence is often filled with various events that serve as rites of passages. Various cultures have historically shown us that adolescence is a crucial point in the emotional and spiritual life cycle. Pre-industrial cultures helped children make the transition between childhood and adulthood through rites of initiation that were led by adults. "Without such rites, today's teenagers have created their own badges of adulthood—from driver's licenses, proms, and graduation ceremonies to the dangerous rituals of binge drinking, first baby, or first jail sentence" (Kessler, 1999/2000, pp. 30-31). Yet, schools can provide appropriate rites of passage for teenagers under the guidance of caring adults.

Consequently, a critical inquiry needs to be conducted into programs such as Senior Project to determine if these programs serve as a transitional project that initiates high school students into the world of adults. We must investigate the possibility for a long-term academic assignment to include principles that are found within rites of passage for teenagers. Kessler (1999/2000) identifies commonalities among rites of passage in various cultures:

> Looking at the principles that are common to initiation in many cultures, we see that a rite of passage is a structured process, guided by adults, in which young people
> - become conscious about the irrevocable transition that they're undergoing;
> - are given tools for making transitions and separations;
> - are initiated into the new capacities required for their next step; and
> - re-acknowledged by the community of adults, as well as by their peers, for their courage and strength in taking that step. (p. 31)

Within rites of passage that embrace these principles, teenagers prepare for the future, learn new skills, cope with the stress that comes from making decisions, and form a foundation that will allow them to create relationships in the adult world of post-high school experiences. Kessler (1999/2000) defines such rites of passage as initiations that

may help children become adults, but most importantly these initiations form adults who are "responsible carriers of the culture" (p. 33).

From a critical theory perspective, I wonder if this is merely a reproduction of the dominant culture or a formation of a new more vibrant and just culture. I agree with Kessler (1999/2000) that our future and our democracy depend upon how our students enter the adult world and on the type of adults they become. I agree that we need to "listen, to learn, and to teach what we have learned about the journey to personal wholeness and about the creation of a caring community" (Kessler, 1999/2000, p.33). The creation of such a caring community requires efforts by educators, parents, students, and the larger community in which the school resides (Noddings, 1992). Yet, again, we need to be careful that we are not merely replicating the current status-quo culture with some rhetoric about caring communities. We need to help our students recognize the injustices and inadequacies within our society, and we need to help them ask critical questions about our cultures in an effort to resist social reproduction and the replication of injustices and inadequacies.

McLaren (1986/1999) and Adams (1996) both deal with the concept of carnival as a form of resistance that is both structured by the institution and deemed appropriate by school officials. These carnivalesque events typically are structured as extracurricular activities usually in the form of social gatherings. Adams (1996) studied the carnival atmosphere of high school homecoming, senior prom, and graduation. McLaren (1986/1999) described the carnival atmosphere at a Catholic junior high school dance. McLaren's (1986/1999) observation of this carnivalesque event is worth noting.

> The dance allowed for emotional contagion and status inversion; it was one of the few occasions during which students could display their superiority: through

> movement....It would appear that events such as the school dance are more important for sustaining the school system than one would otherwise think without being adequately informed by theories of ritual. (McLaren, 1986/1999, pp. 157-158)

Within Senior Project exists an opportunity to institute a carnivalesque event—Senior Boards. During this event, students take on a different personae from that typically displayed in the halls of high schools. They dress in costume or in professional attire for Senior Boards. Often, their attire, whether costume or professional, violates the dress code policy. As a student enters the presentation room, s/he is treated as an adult with equal status to the adults in the room. Once judges are introduced, the student takes charge of the presentation as a type of expert on her/his chosen topic. When the presentation is completed, there occurs a type of celebration within the hallway complete with hugs, congratulations, and occasional tears of joy. Soon after this celebration, the student changes and returns to the personae of a high school student in both appearance and in mannerism.

Do carnivalesque events actually sustain the institutional system of schooling? Adams (1996) seems to make this point in his observations about Homecoming.

> Interestingly enough there are few questions raised regarding the existence of any educational value attached to Homecoming. Members of the school community give little thought as to what Homecoming means or why, even if it is necessary. I assert that the institution uses Homecoming to interrupt the routine that confronts and sometimes confounds students. School is a repetitious series of bells, exams, and homework. Most educators understand the initial few weeks of school are stressful as students return from summer vacation where they had more control over their lives, and return to the controlled environment of school. Thus, there exists a perfect atmosphere for an officially sanctioned event that the school can use as a temporary break from the rigors imposed upon students. (1996, p. 66)

Despite the critical educational value that might be the result of experiences centered around an event such as Homecoming, Adams (1996) makes an excellent point that the institution of schooling may actually use these events as a psychological break from the

standardized rigors of schooling routines. The challenge to critical pedagogues would seem to be how this type of event can be integrated into the curriculum and made more than a sanctioned extracurricular activity or ritual.

In his study Resistance and Identity: Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago (1998), Riggio comments that many boast of being able to "party all night and work all day" (p. 8), which is often the idea that many high school students have concerning adult life. These teenagers often attempt to live out this idea of adult life during carnival times such as Homecoming, prom, and graduation week. Riggio (1998) describes the two competing concepts of time governing life in Trinidad.

> (1) 'Trini time', loose and playful, keyed to the seasons of festivity, celebrating the resistance to and triumph over enslavement, and affirming a stubborn independence and refusal to be governed by the tyranny of the clock; and (2) 'clock time,' measuring labor and guaranteeing the island's place in the multinational flow of capital. This dual rhythm is one dynamic at the heart of Trinbago culture. (p. 8)

This type of lifestyle can be seen in the sleepy eyes of many high school students who have for various reasons stayed up too late the night before. Some of these students have been working, while others have been enjoying a very active social life after the time clock at the school has signaled the end of the business day for schooling. Regardless of their motivation during times of high school carnival, students appear to revel in the fact that they can, as they believe, act as adults and live under two competing concepts of time. In any case, Riggio (1998) seems to be correct when stating, "But Carnival is not Carnival without resistance, opposition, and vagabondage" (p. 8).

McLaren (1986/1999) sees the concept of resistance contributing to the questioning of the ways in which acts of opposition reveal the contradictions between human capacity and agency supposedly nurtured by schools and the actual pedagogical endeavors found

within schools. In other words, schools proclaim to liberate, educate, and create learners who think critically, yet, too often, the pedagogical practices utilized within schools only indoctrinate, replicate, and regulate students to standardized experiences that do not foster critical thought nor transformative educational pursuits. Therefore, schools may proclaim that they provide the freedom to be creative, innovative, and emancipative while at the same time these schools may serve to constrict the creativity, constrain the innovations, and control the freedoms of both teachers and students by compelling educators to use institutional methods that are more procedural than educational. Within this portrait of schooling, the pages of textbooks and tests bind the developing intellects of students while the perceptive intelligence of educators is imprisoned by lesson plans dictated through legislative standardization. These contexts frame a picture of schooling in which students and educators are encased within a pedagogical terrarium filled with cold, lifeless mandates while an elusive butterfly briefly rests on the glass of the terrarium before flittering in the breeze toward inspiring experiences.

Within society's terrarium, the cycles of class reproduction build up and drip back down from the glass encasements upon the inhabitants. Often the members of a certain class see their lives as resistance to the status quo lifestyle that is dangled before them as a carrot on an educational yardstick. Willis (1980) referred to this as "an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western capitalism. However, this damnation is experienced, paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, and as a form of resistance" (p. 3). Resistance to the college preparation programs that are heralded as the best track for high school students serves not only as resistance to the authority of schooling but also as a means of keeping the members of the working class within their

current status. Willis (1980) reports seeing this in his study of the working class lads in Hammertown. I have seen this in many students who may merely be echoing their parents' sentiments about education by expressing disdain for academic activities and what many may term as "book learning."

This view of education held by many in the working class, and I assert that it is held by many in the middle class, is reinforced by a pedagogy that stresses basic skills over critical thought. Admittedly, these presupposed class boundaries are not precise dividers of status or ideology. This can be seen in many of the back-to-basic approaches to education. Also, when teachers tell students that the rationale for learning is to master a skill, which will be needed for work or some other task in the future, it is evident that learning is based upon skills rather than on critical intelligence. The emphasis is not on learning or on understanding but on the accomplishment of practical tasks. Even within the ranks of educators, many will ignore studies regarding theory because they want to know about applications. Willis (1980) records having observed this among the working class students in Hammertown; "theory is only useful insofar as it really does help to do things" (p. 57). The working class according to Willis (1980) reject and distrust the study of theory because they see it as being hollow and empty even though it is this rejection of theory that aids in oppressing them. Within the classroom, students may refuse to study and refuse to learn without realizing that they are only serving to further their own oppression. This form of resistance merely serves as part of the reproduction of social classes and cultures.

Resistance can be the lofty reaching for that motivating and inspiring intellectual experience, or it can be the refusal to engage in pursuits that require critical thought. In

my pedagogical experiences within the classroom, I have found that it is much more difficult to engage students in mental labor than it is to engage them in mindless schoolwork. I have seen students in classes rebel against work that required critical analysis of ideas and concepts while these same students would submissively comply with requests to copy notes from the board, fill in the blanks on a worksheet, or circle vocabulary words in a word-find puzzle. I view this willingness to comply with these factory mentality activities that do not require critical thought as a means of resistance to actual intellectual undertakings. This is the type of resistance to which Willis (1980) refers stating, "In a strange unspecified way mental labour henceforth always carries with it the threat of a demand for obedience and conformism. Resistance to mental work becomes resistance to authority as learnt in school" (p. 103). Could this be the reason why the student who is frequently referred to me, the assistant principal, by her/his English, math, science, and social science teachers is not referred for disciplinary problems by teachers of classes that are not part of the academic core classes? When these students are engaged in work that is either more manual than mental or in work that is tied to both manual and mental labor, do they tend not to resist instruction because their activities are viewed as tied to the adult world with relevancy to life in general? Or, do these students, and teachers, feel less of a demand for obedience or conformism? Maybe, these students are just more interested in what is going on in these classes than they are in the academic core classes. From a critical viewpoint, without forms of resistance, is schooling relegated to reproduce the current culture of schooling?

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) identify how flaws in theories of resistance have led to the failure of examining the insights provided by reproduction theories and the failure to adopt the insights that would help develop a critical pedagogy.

> Furthermore, despite their concrete differences, resistance and reproduction approaches to education share the failure of recycling and reproducing the dualism between agency and structure, a failure that has plagued educational theory and practice for decades, while simultaneously representing its greatest challenge. (Aronowitz & Giroux,1985, p. 73)

Human action must become part of the structure of schooling if critical education is to become a reality within the institution of schooling. This is the challenge laid before educational theorists and practitioners, before administrators and teachers, before communities and their schools.

According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), resistance theorists must work with structured assumptions to achieve a dialectical model of schooling. Furthermore, reproduction theories need to be reconstructed in order to draw out radical and emancipatory insights that will serve to bring human agency into the structure of schooling. To truly be literate in our society, students need more than high verbal and quantitative scores on the SAT; they need to be able to critically question and analyze the ideas formed by our society, our cultures, and our system of schooling. This type of critical literacy allows us to question schools, education, and the experiences of everyone within and around the schoolhouse.

By using critical literacy to critique schooling, we can analyze "the 'methodological madness' that generally characterizes curriculum theorizing, classroom social relations, and technicist modes of evaluation and selection" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 133). Traditional and most current modes of schooling utilize technical modes of evaluation

that serve as a means of selection. As evident in Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, students who are most adept in linguistic skills tend to fare better in school than students who are not adept in linguistic skills. In addition, students who are skillful in quantitative endeavors also fare better in school than students who struggle with computational tasks. Those students who are selected to be at the top of their class are the ones who are proficient in both linguistic and quantitative tasks. Certainly, this is why standardized test scores are broken down into verbal/linguistic scores and quantitative scores. Therefore, these scores do more than provide a picture of the individual student; they provide a sorting process by which the highest scoring students are selected to be on the top of the schooling ladder.

Yet, critical literacy allows us to question the rationale of technicist evaluations and selection methods. By utilizing critical literacy, we can begin to devise educational experiences that provide a means of evaluation through experience itself. This type of alternative assessment can be found in programs such as Senior Project. In order to evaluate how well a student is learning, we do not have to standardize the educational experiences nor do we have to squash the creativity and individuality of students. In fact, the act of experimenting with one's creativity and individuality can be one of the richest educational adventures within a student's life. It can also provide the freedom to express dissatisfaction with current modes of schooling as well as to express goals and dreams for the future.

Critical literacy allows students who are not part of the dominant culture to have a voice in their own educational experiences and in how those experiences are evaluated and valued. Unfortunately, modes of schooling legitimatize the dominant groups'

interests and values while marginalizing interests and values of other groups. Along with the favored desk at the head of the class, students with linguistic and quantitative superiority also enjoy accumulation of cultural capital. The culture of those students who are not as proficient linguistically or quantitatively is devalued by the dominant culture of society and within the culture of schooling. Curricula of schooling tends to ignore subordinate groups or merely recognize the attributes of a few members of these groups to merely give the appearance of what some might term multicultural curriculum. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) delineate how culture plays a part in subordinating groups and in determining the value of certain types of knowledge:

> [T]he dominant school culture functions not only to legitimate the interests and values of dominant groups, it also functions to marginalize and disconfirm knowledge forms and experiences that are extremely important to subordinate and oppressed groups. This can be seen in the way in which school curricula often ignores the histories of women, racial minorities, and the working classes. It can also be seen in the way in which school curricula reproduces the division between mental and manual labor by celebrating "academic or theoretical" forms of knowledge over practical subjects. Thus, what this position illustrates is the way in which schools legitimate dominant forms of culture through the hierarchically arranged bodies of knowledge that make up the curriculum as well as the way in which certain forms of linguistic capital and the individual (rather than the collective) appropriation of knowledge is rewarded in schools. (pp. 147-148)

This depiction of the culture of schooling is dismal. Yet with a curriculum built upon critical literacy, students are rewarded based upon the manner in which they appropriate knowledge based on the collective culture, histories, and experiences of all students rather than on knowledge given sanctity by the dominant group within the school and within society. Within such a curriculum, students would interact with the culture and histories of all groups; thus creating a kaleidoscopic experience for each other that would appear disruptive to the standardized curriculum dictated by the dominant culture of society and schooling. Certainly, such a curriculum would disrupt the technicist

pedagogy that serves to reproduce workers who see education only as a means to achieve economic success.

The portrayal of learning in the institutions of schooling appears to be bleak with its mandates, prepackaged lessons, and standardized-tests that demand educators to teach to the normalized-testing mode of learning. Yet through the means of critical thought and dialectical pedagogy, educators can devise thought provoking educational experiences that are capable of transforming students, the curriculum, and the nature of institutional schooling. "Radical educators must seize the positive moment that exists amidst the cracks and disjunctions created by oppositional forces that are only partially realized in the schools" (Giroux, 1981, p. 31). By seizing these moments of opportunity, educators can utilize political understanding as a tool in a political struggle with the hegemonic practices found in the institution of schooling.

Giroux (1981) calls for a radical pedagogy, which "needs an anthropological grounding but one that recognizes the force of structural determinants that do not show up in the most immediate experiences of teachers and students" (p. 31). The workings of capital, including cultural capital, must be analyzed in their relationship with the institution of schooling and the other institutions such as family, work, and community that permeate the lives of students and educators. As these institutions and the workings of capital are critically viewed, a dynamic matrix comes into focus, which is capable of transforming not only the institution of schooling but also the society itself. From this perspective, a more critical mode of theory and practice will emerge between the sociology of education and the field of curriculum studies. (Giroux, 1981). Any curriculum based upon a theory that isolates students and educators from the experiences

of family, friends, work, career goals, cultural experiences, personal interests, and the larger community will only replicate the current mode of schooling, which is dimly seen through the glazed eyes of students and of educators.

The ideology woven throughout a radical pedagogy is one in which voices of all students, educators, and community members engage in critical conversations. This pedagogical theory is bound together with the threads of freedom. As Giroux (1989) asserts, this is an intercourse of experiences, which serves to resist the composition of societal power that serves to align schooling with the agenda of those who hold such power.

> This is not merely a discourse of pluralism; it is a discourse of irruption; one that pushes history against the grain by challenging those forces within existing configurations of power that sustain themselves by a spurious appeal to objectivity, science, truth, universality, and the suppression of difference. (Giroux, 1989, p.147)

Within a radical pedagogy, human behavior is acknowledged as so complex that it cannot be disassembled by identifying the components of economic production formulas or methods of textual signification, as an origin of the shaping of human behavior and against which such behavior establishes itself. Giroux (1989) presents implications of what he terms the "discourse of student experience" (p. 147) as a major component of a radical pedagogy. Within this discourse, it is essential to analyze the manner in which both teachers and students construct meaning and attach such meaning to their lives within the intricate weaving of historical, cultural, and political forms that are personified and created by both teachers and students.

In initiating such a discourse, teachers need to uncover the histories, interests, and experiences that contribute to the diversity within the voices of their students and that provide "subject positions" for their students (Giroux, 1989). This discourse

acknowledges that what has passed for knowledge, truth, objectivity, and logic are actually the perspectives that have prevailed by the means of political and social power held by the dominant class within the current societal constructs.

A discourse of student experience advances a radical pedagogy that empowers students by allowing them to implement their experiences and culture as they become active in producing knowledge within the teaching and learning process. As a result, students may acquire the knowledge and abilities to perceive how the varied interests contribute to individual and collective voices within their school and community. In addition, students are capable of seeing how these voices are "produced, affirmed, or marginalized within the texts, institutional practices, and social structures that both shape and give meaning to their lives" (Giroux, 1989, p. 148). Such a discourse reveals the process through which teachers, students, and texts enter relationships, construct knowledge, and interact with various forms of understanding that draw not only on what has been revealed through the relationships and the constructed knowledge but also on shared perspectives that are constituted by the individual and collective experiences from the past and the present.

This discourse requires that educators examine the schooling process and at the same time discover or create possibilities within schools for critical pedagogy to flourish. Radical pedagogy is formed within cultural analysis and the importance of combining the language of critique and the language of possibility as a starting point from which a programmatic discourse for radical educators will ensue.

What does a radical pedagogy look like? First, it is messy in terms of not being neatly fashioned on a lesson plan form where the objectives, activities, and evaluation

instruments are checked off in linear steps of completion. The text used in such classrooms is not merely decoratively bound by some distant publisher with a student edition and a teacher's edition in which the answers are hidden from the students so that they can guess at the "correct" answers on a multiple guess test.

Rather in these classes, the text consists of books (fictional and nonfictional), essays, field observations, speculations, experimentations, guest speakers, and experiences (in and out of class as well as from previous events in the lives of both students and educators) that are utilized to construct knowledge and gain both individual and collective understandings. Hence, the text used in this type of class is more than a book purchased from instructional funds or a supplemental book purchased by the students. The text includes such items but also includes much more. Various elements combine to constitute the text used in the class. It is the reading and living of the text "which challenges and refuses the basic assumptions and codes that shape the values that shape the text" (Giroux, 1989, p. 148). These interactions with the texts are not all sophisticated. Therefore, the critical teacher must take into account the development levels of the students and their levels of operation, no matter how rudimentary, in order to guide each student into breaking her/his current intellectual horizon.

Radical pedagogy links learning to empowerment in that the curriculum draws upon students' experiences as "a narrative for agency and a referent for critique" (Giroux, 1989, p. 149). Giroux stresses that this is not some romanticized view of student experiences that merely celebrates their experiences; rather, this pedagogy works on and with students' experiences to the point that experiences are confronted with ideologies in a discourse of suspicion and skepticism.

As one of my eleventh grade, English students once told me. "After this class, I can't just enjoy going to a movie because I am constantly looking for symbolism and hidden meanings behind the dialogue, scenery, and plot of the movie. You have ruined the simple pleasure of going to the movies for me." I took this as a compliment, and I have attempted to repeat this type of transformative educational experience for other students. I agree with Giroux (1989) that the goal is not to create students who possess the rigorous analytical skills that enable them to reveal the "correct" answer. Rather, the goal is to enable students to apply critical understanding in determining a reasoned choice concerning the codes that organize diverse meanings and curiosity into configurations of knowledge and power.

> At issue here is the development of a pedagogy that provides the foundation for developing curriculum models that replace the authoritative language of recitation and imposition with an approach that allows students to speak from their own histories and voices while simultaneously challenging the very grounds on which knowledge and power are constructed and legitimated. Such a pedagogy makes possible a variety of human capacities which expand the range of social identities that students may become. (Giroux, 1989, p. 150)

Within settings stimulated by radical pedagogy and filled with the myriad voices of students and educators, the process of schooling is invigorated with possibility, humanity, and a range of social identities. This enables students to critically examine not only who they are but also who they are becoming, and whether or not they like the image of themselves in life's mirror. Part of radical pedagogy includes allowing students opportunities to try various social identities while seeking their unique social voice as active members within society.

Unfortunately, too many of our schools are taking on the personae of prisons; this is not necessarily in just the appearance given by facilities that attempt to provide a safe and

secure building. Rather, schools have become for many students a place where they are "doing time" and waiting for their release date on graduation day; some students resist the wait for graduation day and choose parole to minimum wage jobs or a Graduation Equivalency Diploma (GED) program. As Giroux (1989) states:

> For too many students, schools are places of 'dead time,' that is, holding centers that have little or nothing to do with either their lives or their dreams. Reversing that experience for students must be a central issue in reconstructing a theory of schooling as a form of cultural politics. (p. 150)

For many teenagers in high school, life is what occurs before the first bell of the school day and after the last bell of the school day. This is the time when students are either engaged in extracurricular activities, social encounters, or the adult world of part-times jobs that may require more than forty hours a week of the teenager's time. When I arrive at school around 7:00 a.m., I usually find students involved in athletic conditioning, drama practice, or preparations for leaving on a field trip. One of my students, Lucy, lives a life that is representative of the adult responsibilities many teenagers have been forced to assume. Lucy's mother is dead and her father is nonexistent as far as Lucy's life is concerned. Lucy lives on her own and works in excess of forty hours a week to pay basic living expenses. In spite of these responsibilities, Lucy is still enrolled at SEHS as a senior and has expectations of graduating this year. She sees the value of gaining a high school diploma, yet I wonder if, for Lucy, being a student is merely "doing time" until she can be socially and culturally released from the schooling experience and awarded status as an adult by virtue of a diploma.

McLaren writes that rituals of instruction and schooling in general are being more focused on control than on liberation. He asserts that the root paradigms of schooling have their origin in what he terms a "culture of pain" (McLaren, 1986/1999).

> There was a distinct eros-denying quality about school life, as if students were discarnate beings, unsullied by the taint of living flesh. Feeling as though they were entombed in a shroud of dead skin, students put their bodies symbolically 'on hold' upon entering the school at the beginning of the day. It was as though saturating the senses was equivalent to alienating the intellect. The ritualized practices of school research have, throughout history, overlooked the fact that the body plays an important part in the acquisition of knowledge. (McLaren, 1986/1999, p. 221)

McLaren (1986/1999) distinguishes between what he calls the "streetcorner state" and the "student state" (p. 91). In the "streetcorner state," actions and behavior do not conform to a predictable scenario. Students in this state tend to be physical and demonstrate unfettered exuberance. The depiction of students in the "student state" appears to be one in which the students' physical body is controlled and thereby her/his mental processes are anesthetized. McLaren (1986/1999) states:

> Youngsters in the student state are generally quiet, well-mannered, predictable and obedient.... Metonymy is prevalent and helps to produce predictable and restrictive cultural forms....Time is segmented and monochromatic....Movements are often resolutely routinized and rigidified into gestures....There is little physical movement unless on the cue of the teacher" (p. 91).

On the contrary, students tend to see the "streetcorner state" as filled with choices, active involvement, and excited play even though education does occur within the "streetcorner state." In fact, it could be said that as much if not more is learned by children in the "streetcorner state" than in the "student state." Yet, youngsters identify the "student state" with hard work, boredom, compliance, and punishment. The challenge for radical pedagogy is to bring the experiences and exuberance of the "streetcorner state" into the classroom, so that education is not isolated within sterile cubicles from the vivacity life. Through radical pedagogy, the cubicles marked school can be transformed so that students do not view school hours as "dead time" (Giroux, 1989 , p. 150).

In order to meet such a challenge, pedagogues must be in touch with the issues that captivate teenagers. These issues, when critically addressed, can weave the curriculum, the teacher, and the students into a collective inquiry that will enliven the class and reach out into the problems faced within society.

> I believe that schools need to be reconstructed around a cultural politics and pedagogy that demonstrate a strong commitment to engaging the views and problems that deeply concern students to cultivate a spirit of critique and respect for human dignity that is capable of linking personal and social issues to the pedagogical project of helping students to become critical and active citizens (Giroux, 1989, p. 150).

Acknowledging the importance of what concerns students is a major step toward revitalizing the educational experiences within our schools.

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) identify three theoretical tasks that need to be addressed in the reconstruction of a radical theory of schooling. First, a critical view needs to be articulated that recognizes the political and strategic differences between schooling and education. Secondly, a discourse and set of concepts needs to be formed around which these differences become theoretically operational in the development of attainable forms of political pedagogy. Thirdly, theories of social and cultural reproduction need to be developed with an analysis of social and cultural production that yields a language of critique and a language of possibility.

Within a radical pedagogy, what is the difference between schooling and education? Schooling involves actions, which occur within institutions linked either directly or indirectly to the government by means of public funding or state controlled certification issues. The institution of schooling perpetuates ideologies that receive legitimacy from the dominant social and political powers within society. Schooling typically defines its relationship to the dominant societal groups as functional and instrumental and often with

heavy emphasis on the economic value of maintaining similar institutions. When forms of critical pedagogy are allowed to surface within such institutions, they are monitored and contained within constraining ideological and material conditions.

Conversely, radical pedagogy views education as taking place outside the established institutions and spheres that are joined to the interests of the dominant social and political groups. Thus, education represents a set of experiences that are collectively produced from various venues and from various perspectives. These experiences are formed around interests, issues, and concerns that provide an opportunity for critical understanding of the daily oppression of those not empowered, as well as the dynamics needed to construct equivalent political and social cultures.

Giroux (1983) defines radical pedagogy "as an entry point in the contradictory nature of schooling, a chance to force it toward creating conditions for a new public sphere" (p. 116). The contradictory nature of schools causes them to become sites of struggle and sites of accommodation. Hence, radical pedagogy obligates radical pedagogues to become involved in oppositional public spheres. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) identify these oppositional public spheres as:

> alliances and social formations which can affect policy decisions over control and content of schooling. In effect, this means that radical teachers will have to establish organic connections with those parents and progressive groups who inhabit the neighborhoods, towns, and cities in which schools are located (p. 134).

Radical pedagogy shatters the invisible walls behind which many educators have hidden throughout their careers. It is a pedagogy that places educators in collectively shared roles with their colleagues, neighbors, and politically active organizations to become agents of change. Credible change will only occur in schooling through a process

that is more than academic; it must also be socially, politically, and culturally active in order to transform schooling rituals into educational experiences.

While politicians and the media bellow reverberations concerning public education and the need to reform based upon statistical scores and standardized experiences, radical educators need to rally to the defense of schools as sites where public service is taught, learned, experienced, and disseminated. This type of public service is charged with creating literate, democratic, and active citizens who are capable of making critical decisions concerning self-government and who are actively involved in the evolution of public welfare. The current atmosphere enveloping schooling is one of political sound bites and misleading media reports. Each elected official wants to be the educational president, governor, senator, congressional representative, mayor, etc. A torrent of governmental initiatives each carrying public schools and their funding in different directions is now swirling schools, educators, students, and communities in a maelstrom of mandates from the Government threatening to drown even the positive efforts of critical pedagogues.

In Georgia, the new Governor, Roy Barnes, has set forth an agenda that he says will stop schools from spending more and producing less. He envisions a universe of schooling where the rationale of capitalism—survival of the fittest—prevails. The headline "'Barnes-storming' Georgia's Schools" appeared on the front page of a newsletter from my local board of education. This article states, "[M]any observers agree that Governor Roy Barnes' plans for public education will rank up there with Hurricane Floyd in terms of power to rearrange the face of public education" (Salzburg County Board of Education, 1999 December 17, p. 1). Furthermore, this article asserts that

Governor Barnes has continued to besiege the state's public schools by claiming, "Georgia's schools are bad, and a rigorous menu of testing and accountability will fix what ails them" (Salzburg County Board of Education, 1999 December 17, p. 1). The caution given in the county's newsletter warns that the Governor's business tactics of demanding more while cutting funding may yield catastrophic problems. These business tactics are founded on "a bottom-line, performance-based monstrosity of a classroom where real learning and the empathetic virtues of good teaching—people who care about students and take time to know them and their parents—may not exist" (Salzburg County Board of Education, 1999 December 17, p. 1). This article ends by encouraging educators and parents to take the opportunity to voice concerns and opinions about the future of public schools in Georgia. Addresses for Governor Barnes and state legislators are provided at the end of the article. This is one area in which radical pedagogues can join with parental and community groups to rally to the defense of public schooling in Georgia and struggle for critical education rather than a standardized, refurbished face for schooling.

> As radical educators, we can help to destroy the myth that education and schooling are the same thing, we can debunk the idea that expertise and academic credentials are the distinguishing marks of the intellectual; and equally important, such educational work could also promote critical analyses of schooling itself and its relation to other institutions included in the state public sphere. (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, pp. 134-135)

This call to action rings very clearly as waves of legislative mandates threaten to douse from public schooling education that teaches students to become active and critical citizens with intellectual skills and the civic courage to struggle for "a self-determined, thoughtful, and meaningful life" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 141).

In Theory and Resistance in Education, Giroux (1983) also makes a call for civic courage. He states that civic courage is a central concept because it can lead to the behavior of thinking and acting as if one lived in a real democracy. This type of civic courage battles against injustices, myths, and prejudices. We can create a theory of schooling that serves as a form of cultural politics by analyzing how social powers organize and maintain classifications of ethnicity, gender, race, and social-status as philosophies and actions that form the current dominant status of power and of politics in our society. Radical pedagogy questions the status of power and questions the attempts to challenge that power. Questioning reform initiatives is not a passive activity of merely critique. Many educators who purport to possess a radical pedagogy have merely settled for passively critiquing the process of schooling. However, true radical pedagogy also adopts the language of possibility and thereby, reaches toward the horizon filled with hope for the future (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1989; Giroux, 1981, 1983; Giroux & Simon, 1989).

My research in this study examines the critical nature of Senior Project as a vehicle for the transformation of schooling into educational endeavors that lead students, educators, and the larger community, of which the school is part, into relationships that share moments of critical thought. It is this critical thought that makes Senior Project a political enterprise capable of disrupting the traditional status-quo establishment of schooling without violating the freedom from intrusions that have a negative impact on learning. This type of political activity is different from the rhetoric used by politicians who have merely reproduced pedagogy until it has become our current institution of schooling. This type of political activity empowers students, educators, and the

community, so collectively they can resist the current institutionalization of schooling. To some, this may sound like a "grassroots" political project, and in a manner of speaking it is. Beyer and Apple (1998) declare that "meaningful curriculum reform must occur within those institutions, and by those people, most intimately connected to the lives of students: teachers, administrators, students, and community members whose work in schools aids the process of genuinely transforming educational practice" (pp. 6-7).

Curriculum reform initiatives that occur as described by Beyer and Apple seem to fit the perception of a "grassroots" movement. Senior Project may be a "grassroots" initiative. If by "grassroots" initiative Senior Project is seen as a localized political initiative to bring critical thought into the process of education, then Senior Project embodies this term. Yet, if the end result is mandating Senior Project and similar pedagogical undertakings as legislative directives, then such pedagogy risks becoming a clone of the current modes of schooling called by different names and slipped into different packages.

In North Carolina, steps are being taken, and have been for several years, to have the state's legislators mandate Senior Project as a requirement for all high school seniors (The North Carolina Education Standards and Accountability Commission, 1997 Feb.). Legislative mandates are not the vehicle through which schooling can be transformed into education. Transformative changes in schooling will only occur through the activism of educators who acknowledge the need for a critical pedagogy that is radically involved with the society of which the school is a part. This is the challenge facing those who would attempt to introduce crucial changes in the theory and practice of curriculum studies.

I assert that the essence of Senior Project provides a vehicle for transforming schooling into critical learning by incorporating the individual as well as the collective voices, experiences, cultures, and interests of everyone who has a concern in the educational missions of our schools. In this research, my focus is upon the possibilities provided by Senior Project that allow students under the mentorship of educators and community members to struggle with the issues students deem as crucial to their lives and their futures. Senior Project also provides scholarly activities and socially relevant inquiries as well as opportunities for evaluation of the academic process through which students are guided. In allowing students to engage in such an educational exertion, Senior Project enables students, their educators, parents, and community to be involved with what matters in the lives of high school students and in the life of society itself.

Mandated Standardized Testing with Focus on the Georgia Department of Education

An article entitled, "The Test of Merit Fails That Standard", appeared in U.S. News & World Report (Toch & Walthallo, 1997). This article stated that some students who could be successful in college were being excluded by the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) that over a million high school students take during the spring. Even though a report published in such a popular magazine denounced such assessment practices, our schools, parents, and students continue to be consumed by such instruments as if they are encapsulated as pencil marks within the bubbles on answer sheets. This article in U.S. News & World Report declares, "The Scholastic Assessment Test is the most influential test in American life—a key to the doors of the nation's best public and private colleges" (Toch & Walthallo, 1997, p. 94). Oddly enough, "The Eight Year Study" (Akin, 1942) revealed that high schools with non-traditional curriculum produced a higher quality of

graduates for universities and colleges than high schools that focused on college entrance exams and Carnegie units. Yet, this study from the late 1930s and early 1940s has all but been forgotten by secondary and post-secondary educational institutions as they are driven by the big business of standardized educational testing. Today, the SAT represents one of the most stressful experiences for many high school students and their parents.

Within the state of Georgia, I believe that many educational issues exist that are relevant to other states and other systems of schooling. The agendas that drive the schooling process in Georgia also drive the schooling processes in other states; hence, Georgia is not facing problems of schooling in a vacuum. These problems facing schooling are perpetuated by political, societal, and cultural agendas that thus far have served to replicate the current status-quo power of our society. Certainly, these problems are faced by every state. Subtle differences may exist, but the standard course of American schooling has been influenced by the sociopolitical agendas that are threaded throughout the nation. My study focuses on a few of these educational issues, problems, and agendas, especially those involving assessment and evaluation. As found in other states, Georgia places considerable resources into furthering the influence of the SAT upon students in Georgia high schools. The Georgia Department of Education (1999) officially states:

> The Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) is designed to measure verbal and quantitative reasoning skills, developed over many years of education, that are related to academic performance in college. SAT scores are intended primarily to help forecast the college academic performance of individual students. Because SAT scores are statistically controlled to maintain the same meaning from year-to-year, and because the SAT-taker population is relatively stable from year-to year, this report can be used to: interpret SAT Program scores of individual students within the broader context of data aggregated across groups of college-bound seniors; study changes over time in the characteristics of students taking SAT Program tests; and

> look at year-to-year educational and demographic changes in this population, along with changes in test performance. (p. 1)

Georgia's Department of Education places such confidence in the merit of the SAT that policy makers have designated massive amounts of funding for this standardized schooling experience. "The state legislature supported the effort to increase student achievement by funding SAT preparation software for all 180 school systems and by funding the PSAT (Preliminary SAT) for all rising tenth graders" (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1).

Obviously, policy makers in Georgia appear to recognize a need for more testing and more instruction that is driven by testing. This emphasis creates a direct impact upon schooling experiences of students and their parents. "Beginning in August 1997, Georgia became the first state to make the Stanford Study Guide for SAT Success program available to students in every public high school and every public library" (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1). One must remember that the primary stated goal of the SAT is "to help forecast the college academic performance of individual students" (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1). In Georgia, high school students choose to earn either a college preparatory seal or a technical preparatory seal on their diplomas. What does this emphasis on SAT scores reveal about efforts of the state to educate students who may not choose traditional college education? If the focus of such testing is on the individual student, then why are average scores reported and publicized? Can standardized educational experiences really be personalized for the individual student? This focus on further standardization of schooling through testing emphasizes Georgia's commitment to schooling rather than to education.

Regrettably, Georgia's focus on standardized testing results in mandated testing that is sterile and void of learning that is connected to life and the critical thought necessary for students to become active citizens within our society. Educators such as Grumet (1998) have commented on the civil ceremonies of schooling and how dramatic ritual with its aesthetic value is missing from our schools. Differences exist between a democratic theater and an institutionalized ritual. In education, there needs to be the variation of meanings and interpretations that as Grumet (1998) asserts "is inevitably part of every theatrical event" (p. 142). Yet, schooling with its institutionalized forms of standardization resembles factory-model rituals carried out perfunctorily to fashion generalized experiences standardized for efficiency.

In the state of Georgia, students experience the schooling rituals of impersonal standardized testing at very early ages. Mandates flow from the state level down through district levels and into classrooms within Georgia's schools. The elementary school experience for students includes the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) as part of the educational assessment rituals across the state. These rituals permeate the schooling experience in Georgia as mandates from policy makers.

> The Georgia Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) requires that norm-referenced tests be administered to students in order to obtain information about how the performance of Georgia students in certain grades compares with that of students in a national sample. Results of these tests are used in instructional improvement activities and in various program evaluation efforts. (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1)

These policy makers utilize norm-referenced testing to evaluate student, teacher, and school performance. Thus, norm-referenced tests drive the quality of educational experiences in Georgia. Rather than focusing on qualitative experiences of education,

there is a massive effort to quantify pedagogical endeavors and to further institutionalize schooling.

Just as the experiences of high school students are driven by the SAT, elementary school experiences are driven by the ITBS. Georgia's official policy regarding the ITBS reflects the importance placed upon this test:

> The Georgia Department of Education provides funding for testing grades 3, 5, and 8. School systems may optionally test students in grades other than the required grades. Funding for any additional optional testing must be provided by the local system.
>
> **All** the tests in the ITBS Complete Battery must be administered to all students in grades 3, 5, and 8. Administration of the entire Complete Battery requires six and one-half hours. [Bold type used by the state for emphasis.] (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1)

Funding was made available to administer the ITBS to all students in grades 1 through 5 in Georgia elementary schools during the spring of 1999. In the spring of 2000, Salzburg County began administering the ITBS as early as kindergarten. For six and one-half hours over the course of four school days, students in Georgia's elementary schools experienced the ITBS. Middle schools in Georgia also administered the ITBS to all students in grades 6 through 8 during the spring of 1999 and in the spring of 2000. This testing administration made the ritual experiences for Georgia's students standardized from kindergarten through grade 8. Given the amount of funding and the amount of labor involved, it appears that Georgia has granted a preeminent status to standardized assessment rituals within its schooling institutions and political agendas.

In addition, the Department of Education in Georgia requires more than SAT and ITBS evaluations of students in schools. Likewise, high school students must pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test in order to receive a diploma. This test replaced an

older version called The Basic Skills Test. Officially, Georgia places an emphasis on such testing to evaluate the cumulative learning experiences of Georgia's students.

> The 1991 Georgia Assembly established the requirement that all students seeking a Georgia high school diploma must pass a new set of tests. The new Georgia High School Graduation Tests differ from the previously required Basic Skills Test in that they include not only the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, but also social studies and science. Furthermore, the law requires that the new tests include process and application skills as assessed in a range of academic content, and shall exceed minimum and essential skills by extending the assessments' range of difficulty. (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1)

Over four days, students in grade 11, and students in grade 12 who have not previously passed the test, spend several hours sitting in desks experiencing what will determine whether they receive a diploma or a certificate of performance. During these four days, students are assigned to a room in the English/Foreign Language Department where a teacher from this department will proctor the test. This teacher, who serves as a proctor, is not allowed to provide any assistance to the students other than reading the scripted testing instructions. Teachers, who have been trained to nurture children and to provide guidance as these children grapple with questions and learning, are required to become authoritarian officials of the state as they provide surveillance. These teachers read instructions and monitor behavior so that the testing situation is not disrupted and so that cheating does not occur. In an attempt to prepare teachers for administering the High School Graduation Test, the Department of Education offers workshops for teachers in the summer designed to help them prepare students for this testing experience.

Regrettably, accomplishments on non-standardized, subject specific performances are not a factor in determining whether a high school diploma is awarded. Hence, receiving a high school diploma is not dependent upon mastery of the material experienced in the classroom and within life; instead, students must demonstrate the

ability to perform at a predetermined, standardized level in a sterile test setting. As evident in this multiple-choice section of the Georgia High School Graduation Test, students are expected to demonstrate knowledge in what has been identified as the core subject areas of English, math, science, and social studies. Students who do not pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test, by the time they have completed all required course work, receive a certificate of performance. These students may return as often as they wish to retake the test until they have passed it. In addition, students who have been identified as needing the services of special education classes may receive a special education diploma if they do not take the high school graduation test or if they take the test and do not pass it.

Other students are affected as teachers, typically in the English departments of high schools, proctor the test, and as other faculty and staff members supervise students not involved in taking this test. (See schedule for Georgia High School Graduation Test given at SEHS in Appendix D.) These students spend this time engaged with worksheets or other forms of "busy work" without the quality instruction that their trained English/foreign language teachers could be giving. The four-day administration of this multiple-choice test represents only one section of Georgia's High School Graduation Test.

Additionally, the Georgia High School Writing Test is a section of the High School Graduation Test administered to high school juniors in the fall of each year. The Georgia Department of Education explains the writing section of this test that is an official ritual for every high school student with the exception of students who will earn a special education diploma.

> Students in the eleventh grade participate in the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test. Students are asked to produce a response to one on-demand persuasive writing prompt. The writing test requires students to write a composition of no more than two pages on an assigned topic. The two-hour test administration includes 90 minutes of student writing time. The test is administered several times a year so students have five opportunities to take the test before the end of the 12th grade.
>
> In November 1992, every high school received two copies of the *Georgia High School Writing Test Assessment and Instructional Guide*. An updated version of the document was disseminated to schools in fall 1993. The *Guide* contains the scoring rubric, describes the analytic scoring procedure, and includes sample student papers. It is intended that this *Guide* assists teachers in their instruction of writing and in preparing students for the writing test.
>
> Scoring for all the graduation tests is done by Test Scoring and Reporting Services (TSARS) in Athens. An individual report is prepared for each student, and the results are summarized for each school and system. (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1)

The Georgia High School Writing Test requires approximately one-half of students' and teachers' school day. Again, teachers in the English Department of high schools typically administer this test. Therefore, all students in these classes spend another class period without their teacher and the instructional experiences that could be taking place.

I recall a student, who several years ago, was in one of my basic level ninth grade English classes. Phillip was classified as an eleventh grade student even though he had not successfully completed the system's requirements for passing freshman English. Phillip had been diagnosed as learning disabled (LD). Yet, at the request of his mother, he was tested by the school psychologist and deemed no longer in need of special educational services that a LD classification ensured him. Hence, Phillip was placed within the regular education program, without the assistance of a special education teacher, where he struggled to make the "grades." I remember Phillip carrying around an eleventh grade literature book and an American history textbook for weeks prior to the administration of the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Finally, this test was

administered to Phillip and other students across the state. During the months after the test, Phillip continued struggling to keep up with the classwork and assignments. Then in the spring of that school year, students received their scores on the High School Graduation Test from their English teachers. In my ninth grade classes, Phillip was the only student who had taken this test, and I had the task of giving him his scores. Phillip was confused by the scores, as are many parents and even some educators. He asked me what the rating of one meant on his Georgia High School Writing Test score. This rating of one was his percentile ranking on the writing section of the test. At first, I hesitated and tried to tactfully evade giving him an answer. But, Phillip was persistent. I can still remember his face full of excited anticipation concerning his status in regard to this standardized schooling experience. I wrestled with whether or not to give Phillip an accurate response to his question. My heart ached as I felt the ethical dilemma of either lying to him or giving him an honest answer to "Mr. Winters, What does this one on my score mean?" I tried giving him an answer filled with educational jargon:

> Phillip, this means that you scored in the number one percentile.
> Mr. Winters, does that mean I am in first place?
> Not exactly. It has to do with testing results and complicated reporting.
> But, what does that mean?

Phillip was persistent, and I was caught between that ethical rock and the hard place that schooling has become for many children. Finally, I broke and revealed to Phillip that the percentile ranking reveals how many students statewide had scored above his score.

> So, is a score of one good?
> A score of one means that ninety-nine percent of the students who took the test scored better than you did.

Phillip was beginning to get the picture. His excitement was draining out of him as if someone had cut his educational jugular vein. He became pale with a shocked look on his

face as he realized that he was at the bottom of the lifeless corpses piled on the standardized testing heap. I attempted to explain to him that he could take the test again, but he was too devastated to listen to my feeble words of consolation and encouragement.

I do not know what happened to Phillip except that he stopped coming to school shortly after that. Possibly, he took a parole from schooling to the minimum security of a low paying job; hopefully he enrolled in a GED program. But in either case, I will never forget being the bearer of news that devastated one of my students. I will never forget Phillip's desire to pass a test that he and many others do not understand. I will never forget how the system of schooling poorly served him, for his face is etched in my memory with a darker hue than the number two pencil with which he saw his fate sealed by public schooling.

With the imminent passage of Governor Barnes's Educational Reform Bill will come the end of the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Adding to the storage bins of standardized tests in Georgia will be mandated criterion reference competency tests (CRCT's) in grades 1 through 8. A different type of standardized evaluation will replace the High School Graduation Test just as the High School Graduation Test replaced the Basic Skills Test. According to the Georgia Department of Education:

> End-of-course tests in high school for core subject areas will be developed.... The questions and answers for the end-of-course and criterion reference competency tests are to be released each year. Note: It costs money to create new test items. The High School Graduation Tests will be eliminated when the end of course tests are put in place. (Georgia Department of Education, 2000, pp. 4-5)

The Governor's bottom line is found within a note in this summary. The focus of the note is on the costs to create new items for these tests. I wonder if these tests are replaced merely to provide financial opportunities to create more tests. Are these evaluation

agendas managed on the expectations of funding the ever-growing big business of public education?

I wonder if the employees of the state's Research, Evaluation and Testing Division focusing on Student Learning and Assessment have the faces of students in mind when they devise and oversee the vast endeavor of standardized schooling. The State Department of Education in Georgia employs thirteen professional staff members and three clerical staff members in its Research, Evaluation and Testing Division focusing on Student Learning and Assessment. (Georgia Department of Education, 1999). This division of the State's Department of Education demonstrates an entrenched commitment to evaluation and testing with labor and financial resources.

In addition, the Georgia Department of Education places emphasis on writing evaluation and assessment in grades other than the eleventh. In 1991, Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act: Section 20-2-281 was amended to require writing assessments administered in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. An advisory council was created comprised of educators with expertise in teaching writing skills and in writing assessment. The goal and purpose of this council and the Department of Education is officially stated as an effort "to create developmentally appropriate assessment procedures to enhance statewide instruction in the language arts. Statewide writing assessment serves the purpose of improving writing and writing instruction" (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p. 1). Writing assessment in Georgia is seen as a more authentic type of assessment and evaluation with ties to enhancing instructional practices throughout the state. Yet, it is still another mandated form of assessment and evaluation that ensures standardized assessment experiences for all students statewide. Does an assessment instrument that is

less statistically quantified than a multiple-choice instrument reflect a more authentic assessment? One must remember that the state furnishes a scoring rubric and an analytical scoring procedure for these tests. Could this be an attempt to merely co-opt authentic assessment as a guise in which to conceal the institutionalized ritual of standardized schooling? This standardizing process is a great threat to reforms of the current schooling system. Too often, innovative reforms including authentic forms of assessment are standardized, and students and teachers are mandated to adhere to these forms as they are handed down from a state board of education. This is often seen when pedagogical philosophies are treated as if they are generic methods to be applied without critical reasoning or reflection. Again, this process consumes the schooling institution within society at the peril of education.

Likewise, the U.S. Department of Education has mandated a project entitled the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that is overseen by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). "Georgia is one of more than 40 states, territories, and the District of Columbia which have participated in each bi-annual cycle" (Georgia Department of Education, 1999, p.2). NAEP has generated numerous reports (over 200) that span eleven instructional areas. One of these reports is published as "the Nation's Report Card" which is billed as a continuing assessment of what students in the nation know and are able to perform. NAEP contributes another mandated form of assessment that has claims of providing a more authentic assessment and evaluation of students. NAEP varies the subject areas assessed from year to year, while the most frequently evaluated areas are in reading, writing, science, and mathematics. Any single student does not take the entire assessment, and the test sessions consume no more than

one-and-a-half to two hours. These assessments are made in the spring of the school year with the state assessment typically occurring in February (Georgia Department of Education, 1999).

When it comes to education in Georgia, the two most influential state level officials are the governor and State Superintendent of Schools. The efforts and agendas of these two politicians represent the increasing standardization vortex that threatens to consume and annihilate all educational efforts to meet the diverse needs of students based upon developmental levels, ability levels, cultural backgrounds, interests, and future goals. Hence, mandates that reinforce schooling over education flow from the federal and state levels. Therefore, how can anyone question the political and cultural power of schooling?

The State Superintendent of Schools has a web site that describes The ABCs of Georgia Schools: A Progress Report (Schrenko, 1999). The letter A stands for accountability, the letter B for back to basics and reduced bureaucracy, and the letter C for classroom safety and local control. The rhetoric may at first sound appealing, yet we must critically listen and analyze projected results of such schooling mandates. Under accountability, there are four items. The first item sets a goal for raising the composite score on the SAT to 1,000. This is the first goal on the State Superintendent's list for educational progress in Georgia. The second item declares that schools must formulate improvement plans with achievable, measurable academic goals. Apparently, having a composite score of 1,000 on the SAT is the type of goal for which the State Superintendent is looking. The third item proclaims that an annual state report card will continue to list "extensive statistical assessment data for every public school and school system in the state for school improvement purposes" (Schrenko, 1999, p. 1). Again, the

educational experiences and the development of our students are being reduced to statistical representations. The fourth item under accountability reaffirms Pay for Performance, which rewards schools for designing and meeting their own merit programs. Under the back to basics agenda, the SAT and the PSAT are both mentioned as areas of focus. Within the ABCs of Georgia Schools, the focus and energy is on standardizing the state's schooling process based upon statistical assessment as reported in the state's report card that pivots on assessment instruments such as the SAT and PSAT.

Governor Roy Barnes spent a considerable amount of time campaigning on education issues. On June 7, 1999, he delivered a speech to the Education Reform Study Commission that highlights his agenda for education in Georgia. In this speech, Barnes (1999) stated:

> But sadly, as Georgians, you also don't have to be told that our progress in education has not been fast enough or good enough or bold enough, and that despite the good things about our state, we are falling short....Public education is our Achilles' heel. (p. 1)

The Governor went on to say that in Georgia we spend more than twice what we spent ten years ago on education. Did he attempt to factor in cost of living increases or population increases or spending to update facilities or spending to keep up with technology? Governor Barnes (1999) declared, "Starting today, I ask you to join me in making education our number one priority" (p. 2) This rhetoric makes a fine rallying cry that has been used by countless politicians.

Furthermore, Governor Barnes (1999) claimed that too many of Georgia's children are being failed by the state's system of schooling. This too is a vague statement, which makes for a good sound bite. The facts the Governor is referring to are SAT scores, ITBS

scores, NAEP scores and state High School Graduation Test scores. His facts are statistical representations from experiences on standardized tests.

> These stats and many, many more like them say—scream—at us: We're not doing enough! They say, get serious about doing more! They say, hurry up! And the only way we are going to get the results we want; the only way we are going to raise test scores and create opportunity; the only way we are going to rebuild our public school system is to re-examine what we are doing and what we are failing to do. (Barnes, 1999, p. 3)

Again, this sounds good, as political rhetoric should. But when I critically listen to the agenda that is driven by statistics and by attempts to raise test scores, I ask, Do we want our children's educational experiences to be determined by composite test scores? Do we want learning to be driven by assessment that is predominantly recitation of trivial facts?

Barnes (1999) pronounced that the answer to the educational dilemma in Georgia, which is to raise test scores, is in the ethics and principles of the business world. The economic market and capitalistic agenda of "survival of the fittest" are Barnes's answer for the problems that face schooling. This is his pronouncement:

> How can it be that we've nearly doubled the spending for education over the past ten years, and aren't getting results[?] This would never be tolerated in the private sector. In fact, business today demands just the opposite of what we are doing in government. The businesses that lower costs and increase productivity are the ones that make it in today's economy. Somehow, we in our public education have managed to increase costs and lower productivity. (Barnes, 1999, p. 4)

Schooling is a social process that includes many variables, all of which cannot be quantified on some testing instrument or reduced down to the lowest bid. Can we run a socialistic endeavor such as educating all children in our society by using the principles of capitalistic entrepreneurship and its motto of "survival of the fittest?" Mandated testing and legislated goals for composite test scores may be the answer if we want a corporate

revolutionary takeover within our schools, if we want schools operated under the harsh logic of capitalism and the cruel methods of monetary management. Politicians such as Governor Barnes and State Superintendent Schrenko seek to reproduce dominant political and social cultures of society through public schools based upon the ethics of capitalism and the philosophy of standardization.

If these mandated tests constituted the only experiences students and teachers had in schools, then a foreboding portrait of boredom would be all that depicted educational experiences within our schools. Fortunately, there are some other forms of assessment and evaluation being utilized in some schools. In addition, there are some researchers who are acknowledging the need to study testing from a critical theory perspective. Kendall Phillips (1995) states:

> While testing is often considered by those who critique education in general (e.g., Giroux, 1989), a specific focus on testing and on controversies surrounding testing is a worthwhile activity. As has been suggested, the practice of testing represents an intersection of scientific, political, and social concerns. A focus on this 'intersection' might prove interesting to those studying the way humans create, conceive, and resist social institutions. (p. 295)

Mandates regarding standardized testing represent efforts by politicians to structure the institution of schooling after the scientific-efficiency model without listening to cries from social concerns that call for resistance to such outdated modes of schooling. It is with an ear attuned to cries of social concerns that I turn to some of the alternatives to standardized testing.

Alternatives to Standardized Testing

I have provided an overview of critical theory as well as a profile concerning standardized testing in Georgia. In this section of my review of the literature, I would like to examine the theoretical framework of neo-progressivists. This group of neo-

progressivists espouses theories that are more in line with my administrative position. During the early part of the twentieth-century, progressive educators attempted to initiate learning that was experiential for students. By the 1930s, many of the experiential learning programs had made their way into elementary education. These initiatives seemed to end by the time students entered secondary education experiences (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 1995).

In The Story of The Eight-Year Study, Akin (1942) gave an overview of one of the most extensive studies conducted concerning curriculum of American high schools. In 1930 during the annual meeting of The Progressive Education Association, several leading educators questioned how high schools could improve their service to American youth. Every answer to their question met the same obstacle—a recognition that any major reform of high school education could create a risk of reducing chances for students to be admitted into college. These progressive educators were concerned with reforming the system of high school education without disrupting chances of students' being admitted into college. One conclusion of The Eight-Year Study was a determination that colleges received a higher proportion of sound, effective candidates from more experimental schools in their study than they did from candidates in traditional schools. This confirmed that the rituals found within the traditional schools were not presenting the best methods for preparing students for college. The findings of this study hold relevancy for how curriculum is designed in schools today and for how students experience learning.

Curriculum models designed with a focus on experiential learning in the United States can be traced back to the progressive education movement, which was advocated

by John Dewey. In Democracy and Education, Dewey (1916/1997a) looked at the curriculum in relation to aims and interests of students. He called for a place of play and a place of work within the school's curriculum. I interpret Dewey's place of play to be activities in which students and teachers have freedom to question, explore, and investigate personal initiatives. I view places of work to be where students and educators can engage in educational experiences while having freedom from being excluded by vocational and academic institutions. Educators and parents want students to be successful after high school in the world of post-secondary education or in the labor market; therefore, they are concerned about educational practices that could limit opportunities for students in the future. Progressive educators have viewed the ritual of test-driven, standardized curriculum as having taken enthusiasm that makes learning an interesting venture out of the school. Progressive educators called for far-reaching educational reform early in this century. Their goal was for students to experience genuine learning that was tied to experiences of life. Through this connection of knowledge, experience, and community life, educators in the progressive movement sought to reform passive learning into an active-participant endeavor. In School and Society, Dewey (1900/1990) reflected this in an affirmation that schools tie learning of ideas and ideals to experience.

> To do this means to make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious. (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 29)

Progressive educators across the nation echoed this call for experiential learning. The problem that experiential education presents is one filled with controversy. When students are allowed to formulate questions and research areas of interest, then schools and communities begin to question the appropriateness of such experiences. When the appropriateness of books and films is questioned, it is recognized as censorship. Parents, schools, and communities often exercise their rights to control material to which children are exposed. The problem that society has encountered with censorship revolves around the concern of just who decides what is inappropriate. The same can be said of educational experiences. Schools routinely censor the educational experiences of students by regulating academic pursuits and learning activities of students. The problem is the same as it is with censoring materials; this problem revolves around determining who decides which experiences and activities are appropriate and which are inappropriate for students to experience. In dealing with this question, it appears that educational communities have decided to standardize educational experiences of students so that everyone receives a generic education. This provides a basis for the inception of educational standardization that, according to Spring (1986), has gripped American society especially educational philosophies and methodologies of the educational community.

Theodore Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools present one initiative to reform public education from the grip of institutionalized standardization. Sizer (1985) submits his studies of high schools across the nation to formulate a portrait of school reform in Horace's Compromise. He presents this ideology through the experiences of Horace Smith, a fictional high school English teacher. Horace felt frustration with the

current state of American secondary schooling that had ignored the complexity and nuisances of pedagogy. Horace lamented the indifference toward the most important characteristics of the school system—teachers and their pedagogical practices, which can make schooling worthwhile or worthless.

Especially at the secondary level, teachers are the ones who help students utilize careful reasoning while facing complicated social, cultural, political, and economic issues. High schools are not merely training centers based on a factory model of education; they are places where young people develop individual thought, appreciations, and judgments through their educational experiences and interactions.

In Horace's School, Sizer's (1992) sequel to Horace's Compromise, the fictional English teacher Horace remained the major character in this struggle to recreate the American high school. Horace became the chair of a committee to recreate, not just reform his high school. The struggles through which Horace labored are mirror images of struggles faced by high schools today and by Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. Sizer was again using his real life research to write a fictional account that was actually a docudrama of his own work. The fictional Horace sought to recreate his high school from what resembled an old-fashioned assembly line into a school that focused on student experiences and exhibitions of what these students had learned through experiences. Hence, student assessments whether formally conducted or not formally conducted, comprise a vital component of schooling experiences, which was a major point that Sizer (1985, 1992, 1996) makes through the character of Horace.

A colleague of Sizer's, Joseph McDonald, while working as a senior researcher with the Coalition of Essential Schools, examined schools implementing goals espoused by the

coalition. In his research, McDonald (1993b) observed that in order to rebuild American high schools we need to utilize projects much like the ones found in Senior Project curriculum—linking learning experiences rather than isolating them.

In implementing this type of curriculum, teachers need to have tuned their judgements to common and high standards for themselves and for their students. This requires cooperation within the school as well as between the school and the community. In addition, new systems of information are necessary for a more responsive and extensive curriculum than the ones traditionally used by the schooling system. Educators must find grouping patterns that are more sensitive to human diversity and potential than the system of age-grading and ability tracking.

McDonald (1993b) stated, "Finally, and most importantly, we will need a commitment to democratic principles that is more than platitudinous—that can materially affect the school, that can pervade its habits" (p. 485). The elements McDonald outlines can be found within the Coalition of Essential Schools Ten Common Principles (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1999).

The sixth principle in the Coalition of Essential Schools Ten Common Principles addresses the need for modes of assessment that are alternatives to standardized testing.

> Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The final diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation—an 'Exhibition.' As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of 'credits earned' by 'time spent' in class. The emphasis is on the students. (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1999, p. 2)

The Coalition of Essential Schools calls for alternative assessment tools and for curricular concerns to focus on depth of learning rather than on coverage of more material. "Curricular decisions should be guided by student interest, developmentally appropriate practice, and the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement" (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1999, p. 1). The focus shifts from scores on state and federally mandated tests to interests, needs, and experiences of the students.

Is not this student-centered pedagogy that has been advocated in the past? The answer might be yes, but we must be careful not to categorize new initiatives by old concepts, or we will simply replicate the current institution of schooling using new terminology with the same terminal effect—the reproduction of the dominant social powers. I maintain that when we look at new programs through the perspectives of old glasses, we only see from that old perspective.

Consequently, new initiatives can borrow from the concepts of old programs and ideologies without being merely repackaged resurrections of the past. There have been some great ideas sewn into the fabric of failed programs, and under the magnifying lens of critical pedagogy, these ideas can be discerned from the failed endeavor, extracted, and utilized within more innovative ideologies that serve to reform education rather than reproduce schooling.

As part of the Coalition of Essential School's reform initiatives, McDonald (1993a) defines a process called "planning backward." Planning backward is defined as a type of school reform that embodies a strategy which "focuses on the *redesign* of school. It initially postpones consideration of structural change and the transformation of practice in order to consider first what schools aim for and how they might know whether their

aim succeeds" (McDonald, 1993a, p. 2). The main component of this strategy is the senior exhibition. Yet, the individual high school must be willing to undergo self-examination by analyzing the exhibitions of the seniors in each graduating class. This concept allows the school to assess competencies of their graduating seniors and in turn to assess competency of the school in teaching those students.

Behind this ideology is the theory that if seniors are not exhibiting the skills the school has identified for seniors to exhibit, then the school must reassess its pedagogical efforts. Once this self-analysis is complete, the school can institute necessary changes within the curriculum and within the instructional strategies utilized. In this manner, schools set standards for graduates, evaluate those graduates according to those standards, and adjust downward from grade twelve so future graduates better meet the standards.

McDonald (1993a) identifies four steps in the planning backward process: "defining a vision, building a platform, rewiring, and tuning" (p. 3). The vision is defined by what the educators determine graduates should be performing in exhibitions to demonstrate that students are using their minds critically. The vision is also created with participation of all stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students, parents, business and community leaders, as well as others who have an interest in local public education). Once the vision has been fashioned, schools "must also dare to compare their new visions of the ideal graduate to the real kids they will graduate this year" (McDonald, 1993a, p. 5). This is building a platform that is, in the beginning, built upon the school's current curriculum and pedagogy. This platform is an assessment device not only for the students but also for the entire educational program of the school.

> The platform design may involve public recitals; it may resemble the presentation and defense of a doctoral thesis; it may fill the gym with displays and artifacts, as in an art exhibition or science fair; it may command an expertly scored performance, as in an Olympic trial or the road test for a driver's license. (McDonald, 1993a, p. 6)

Each school determines the format of these exhibitions, which reflects the schools' and students' individuality and a collective vision.

Exhibitions become ceremonial much like other high school rituals (e.g., homecoming, senior prom, and the graduation procession). Yet, the best formats require rigorous demonstrations of intellectual pursuits often fashioned around personal interests of students who are guided by teachers and community members. Senior exhibitions become more than a graduation procession; they become displays of students demonstrating knowledge, skills, and proficiencies that the school has helped them achieve. The student may be standing alone in front of an audience presenting what s/he has learned about a particular topic that has been researched, but along with the student stand pedagogical efforts of teachers, parents, and community members who have assisted the student in her/his educational pursuits. When the student excels and meets the expectations of the schooling community, then everyone shines, but when the student falls short of expectations, then it is time to rework, or as McDonald (1993b) says "rewire" the curriculum.

By rewiring, the school makes adjustments or additions to current curriculum and pedagogy. Some changes can be implemented quickly, while others take a considerable amount of time to implement. An adjustment in curriculum and pedagogy of courses taken by juniors should be evident in exhibitions the following year, while changes in curriculum and instruction for freshmen students might not be seen for several years.

These changes can be made across the curriculum, and should be made across the curriculum so that learning experiences are not isolated.

One final step in the process of planning backward is "tuning." McDonald (1993a) describes this step as one in which critical friends of the school provide analytical feedback concerning learning experiences and exhibitions. "Tuning" involves opening up the school and its educational endeavors to the outside world of college, business, and community insights. The insights gained from this step are much more critical and authentic than scores on the PSAT, SAT, or the state's high school graduation test. This entire process is designed by the school and the community rather than by legislators or lobbyists of special interest groups who prey on the addiction of politicians for campaign funds and votes.

Other efforts to reform schooling experiences are being conducted by Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE). SERVE is part of a network of ten educational laboratories funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement operated by the U.S. Department of Education. These ten educational laboratories provide services to all fifty states and U.S. territories. The laboratories constitute a knowledge network that provides information and resources to be shared nationally and distributed by regional laboratories in efforts to improve student learning and achievement. SERVE provides services to Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The mission of SERVE is "to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast" (SERVE, 1999, p. 1). Program areas through which SERVE provides a range of resources, services, and products in response to local, regional, and national needs are varied. These programs include

assessment, accountability, and standards, as well as school development and reform. Additionally, SERVE has programs focusing on children and families, technology, and on many other initiatives (SERVE, 1999).

On the high school level, SERVE has supported research and development efforts in assessment and accountability with the program, Senior Project. Since 1994, SERVE has been developing, implementing, and researching this innovative program. Senior Project has encapsulated similarities to the Coalition of Essential Schools component of graduation by exhibition. In the literature concerning Senior Project, SERVE has often quoted Sizer and has drawn a parallel between Senior Project and the idea of graduation by exhibition that the Coalition of Essential Schools has purported as innovative reform.

Educators who desire to implement Senior Project receive support from SERVE through training opportunities, annual institutes, coordinator networking meetings, and publications, which include a video on Senior Project implementation. In addition, SERVE provides consultants who visit schools and conduct ongoing research on Senior Project. Furthermore, Senior Project demonstration sites are supported by SERVE, and these school sites provide sources of data to support the research into Senior Project. These high school demonstration sites are located within SERVE's region representing a diverse population. "As a sampling, we have schools located in the Mississippi Delta, urban Charlotte, North Carolina, suburban Orlando, Florida, and rural Georgia" (SERVE, 1999, p. 1). SERVE furnishes support to over 35 high schools identified as Senior Project demonstration sites.

In 1997, SEHS became a Senior Project demonstration site. I attended the annual Senior Project institute, which was in Charlotte, North Carolina, that summer. During this

institute, I applied for my school to become a demonstration site and receive a startup grant to begin implementation of Senior Project. One of the forms of assistance SERVE provided at no cost was Senior Project Training conducted by Carleen Osher and Jane Summers of Far West Edge, Inc. The flyer that announced Senior Project Training for the fall of 1997 stated:

> Carleen and Jane, two English teachers from Medford, Oregon, first developed a Senior Project program at their high school in the mid-1980s, where high school seniors wrote a research paper on an approved topic of their choice, developed a product or project connected to their research, and presented their results to a review board consisting of community members. Each student was mentored by a faculty or community member. (SERVE, 1997, p. 1)

The flyer also stated that educators could find out more about Senior Project development, stimulating interest among students, faculty, and the community, creating a mentoring program, and integrating Senior Project into the local school's curriculum. I arranged for seven teachers and our school's instructional supervisor to attend the Senior Project Training in Tallahassee, Florida.

One year later, I was asked to participate in a presentation on Senior Project at the 1998 SERVE Regional Forum on School Improvement held in Atlanta, Georgia. During this session, Paula Egelson and Patrick Harman presented data on SERVE's Senior Project Network. The data was gathered from surveys administered to high school seniors, parents, and teachers from schools implementing Senior Project during the 1997-1998 school year. My school was one of the schools providing responses to the survey.

The Egelson and Harman (1998) report provided the most recent qualitative data on Senior Project as implemented with support from SERVE. Responses were given to various questions contained within a survey. Student responses revealed a favorable perception of the Senior Project experience. Responses revealed that students felt they

had learned new personal skills, new job skills, and new academic skills. Students commented that Senior Project helped them learn such skills as time management, organizational skills, responsibility, courage, confidence, as well as how to ask for assistance, how to follow through with a long-term project, and the opportunity to pursue individual interests as part of their formal education. These personal skills have certainly been valuable for students to learn; yet, these skills are virtually impossible to assess using standardized evaluation instruments.

Many students whose comments disclosed the learning of new skills indicated that job skills were learned through Senior Project. Job skills learned during this experience varied depending on the interests, goals, and choices made by the students. This represented an opportunity for students to experience the freedom to pursue vocational aspirations while still in high school. Some of the areas in which students learned job skills included working with musical instruments, computers, video and audio equipment, setting up a daycare, using mechanical drawing for architectural design, and the usage of alternative fuels for vehicles, to name just a few. These responses represented the manner in which Senior Project was able to focus on career or vocational aspirations of students.

According to students, learning new academic skills was also part of the Senior Project process. These academic skills included writing research papers, developing a thesis, speaking before an audience, making formal presentations, and broadening knowledge of subjects previously learned. As can be seen, students involved with Senior Project recognize the importance of learning written and oral communication skills.

Furthermore, this report shows that some students engaged in social learning through this process. This learning included gaining respect from others and from one's self.

Some students reported having learned from putting their knowledge into practice rather than only learning from books and lectures. Additionally, some students divulged that the best part of Senior Project was interacting with the community and being able to influence someone else's life; this allowed these students to experience both personal and social agency. Here again, education, as opposed to schooling, is difficult to quantify; nonetheless, it is crucial to becoming a critical learner.

The responses from teachers revealed that administrative support for Senior Project was strong while acceptance from the schools' faculty was not quite as strong. In fact, almost twice as many teachers saw strong administrative support for Senior Project as compared to support from the faculty of the schools. This lower level of support from throughout the general faculty within schools has been reported in studies of the implementation of other new programs. In a study conducted between 1986 and 1990 by the Coalition of Essential Schools, one finding revealed that at "most schools, a core of faculty members became active in their school's reform, but their efforts often ended up dividing the faculty" (Muncey, D. E. & McQuillan, P.J., 1993, p. 2).

Consequently, this does not represent a reason to be in opposition of changes within schooling, but it is a factor of which to be aware and for which to be prepared. In spite of the responses concerning the level of faculty acceptance, the majority of teacher responses reveal that Senior Project was a very useful program in their schools. Responses also show that the majority of teachers were very satisfied with the quality of student work on the senior projects.

Parental and student reactions to Senior Project unveil some differences concerning feelings about Senior Project. The majority of student responses divulge very positive

feelings about Senior Project, and none of the student responses show very negative feelings about their experience whereas, the responses from parents did not reflect such a strong positive feeling about these experiences. Could the sense of ownership in Senior Project contribute to the students' strong positive feelings?

One of the most interesting sections of the Egelson and Harman (1998) report revealed a difference between the large and small high schools. For this survey, a small school was identified as having 600 or fewer students enrolled. In the data, the degree of satisfaction among students, teachers, and parents was reported higher at small schools than at the large schools. Yet, all of the schools, large and small, reported having positive experiences with Senior Project. Students in smaller schools reported that they are more satisfied with the way the programs are explained to them by their teachers and mentors. When it came to support and feedback students received during the process, a larger percentage of students from small schools reported being very satisfied than did the students from large schools. Students from both the large and small schools expressed a need for some changes to be made in the implementation of Senior Project. After analyzing the differences between the large and the small schools, it appeared that small schools were having more success with Senior Project. Yet, large schools were still being successful just not at the high level reported by the small schools. Success in large schools reflected that a large majority of the students complete Senior Project without failing this portion of their English classes. In small schools, students were also successfully completing the Senior Project component of their English classes, and these students were reporting that Senior Project was a positive learning experience. Teachers in small schools also reported that Senior Project was an important addition to the

learning experiences of students. In larger schools, teachers and students asserted more negative comments about Senior Project than their counterparts in smaller schools.

Possibly, this difference between large and small schools was more a comment on school size rather than on Senior Project, or it was relative to the differences in culture between small and large schools. SEHS, which was considered a large school for this study, had highly favorable responses to the survey questions. Research on the difference between rural, suburban, and urban schools could offer insight in these areas. For the Egelson and Harman (1998) study, SEHS was defined as a large school, yet it is located in a rural area. Possibly, the location of the school and the community was more of a contributing factor than the size of the school.

The major findings reported by SERVE in their Senior Project research indicated that the program has been making a difference in schools through raised expectations and standards for students. According to Egelson and Harman, these raised expectations are held by educators and the larger school community after Senior Project has become part of the curriculum. These higher expectations and standards were not always easy to quantify, yet the quality of education within these schools was being reported in a more positive light than before Senior Project was implemented. At a Senior Project Institute, Egelson and Harman (1999) also presented their data on Senior Project. In this session, they revealed some of the benefits of Senior Project by stating:

> As a result of Senior Project, many of the educators have raised both their expectations and standards for students in their schools. Senior Project often becomes a self-evaluation activity. By analyzing Senior Project work, educators can revise their school programs to more adequately prepare students for the world after high school. Some of the teachers directly associated with the program have become professionally revitalized; others have become motivated to make sweeping changes within their schools or speak at conferences or workshops about their Senior Project experiences. Students participating in Senior Project have acquired new skills and

> more self-confidence. Many have developed more focused career plans, and some have been offered scholarships or jobs. Unmotivated students have become high achievers during this process. Community members at some sites have rallied around the Senior Project concept, volunteering their time and support, and publicizing the program to a wider audience. Seniors at Broad Street High School in Shelby, Mississippi, recently concluded, 'Senior Project shows us if we are ready for the real world.' (Egelson and Harman 1999, p. 5)

The benefits elaborated on by Egelson and Harman can be seen at SEHS. Through my research, I will attempt to reveal the nuances found in the voices of students at SEHS and in the hues of their vivid experiences.

In addition, Jane Summers (1989), an English teacher at South Medford High School in Medford, Oregon, recorded her efforts involving Senior Project. Jane Summers and her colleague, Colleen Olsen, have been instrumental in SERVE's Senior Project training sessions and institutes. Summers (1989) stated that Senior Project brought a whole staff in a high school together to assist students by providing an opportunity for these students to experiment with the freedom to explore personal interests.

All seniors at South Medford High School were involved with Senior Project. Expectations for seniors at different ability levels were of course different, but everyone went through the same process. Students took risks and struggled with the process. Some students even failed a component of the process, but they succeeded if they successfully completed the entire process. The process at South Medford High School required that students "write an eight- to ten-page research paper, spend at least fifteen hours creating a related project, and speak to a panel of judges about the projects, the research, and their personal growth" (Summers, 1989, p. 62). This process allowed students to incorporate topics of personal interest into an educational experience that revealed how rigorous their studies had been during their senior year and how much they had learned about inquiry

throughout their years in the school system. Therefore, skills that had been built and honed even from elementary school were utilized and opened for public scrutiny through the process of each student's senior project. McDonald's (1993a, 1993b) concept of planning backward can be utilized at this point.

Likewise, Jacqueline Ancess and Linda Darling-Hammond (1994) conducted research that revealed a picture of the pedagogy behind Senior Project. This research examined Senior Project, as implemented at Hodgson High School. Senior Project at Hodgson was described as an authentic-performance-based assessment initiative. This initiative included three components consisting of a research paper, shop product, and formal presentation. Students began Senior Project at the end of their junior year by selecting a faculty advisor who would guide them through their individual projects. The students, along with their advisors, collaborated "in a fashion similar to the doctoral dissertation process" (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 5). Through a process of self-inquiry, students learned "about their talents as well as about their interests, and about the power of their talents and interests to generate initiative, hard work, and satisfaction—the cornerstones of a life-long work ethic" (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 5).

As can be seen in the differences between Senior Project as implemented by Medford High School and Hodgson High School, the format used in Senior Project may differ from high school to high school, yet the process remained the same. Students participated in a process of inquiry that required them to make use of prior knowledge and skills as they examined new areas motivated by personal interest. This has been the hallmark of life-long learning and an experience that has fostered success in future

undertakings. Thus, the ideology behind Senior Project can also become a vehicle for a critical pedagogy that is transformative rather than reproductive. This type of pedagogy serves to do more than prepare students for graduation; it also serves to emancipate students from the standardization of schooling into their individual pursuits as critical thinking young adults.

At Hodgson, the evaluation criteria provided dialogue among the staff. This dialogue allowed the staff and the students' Senior Project committees to focus on the substance and the rigor of the projects. The Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994) research reported that the criteria such as the "demonstration of higher-order thinking skills, originality, and creativity set a framework for the committee's discussion about the suitability of individual student's selections" (p. 7). Criteria such as this revealed the qualitative nature of the evaluation used in Senior Project. In addition, the interest and curiosity shown by students in the topics they had chosen, provided self-motivation that was able to sustain students through the hours of hard work and frustration that are part of any rigorous enterprise. The educators who worked with the students assured that students extended or stretched their knowledge and abilities, which added to the rigor of each student's project. These efforts maintained, as well as created, new expectations for students, educators, and the entire school. Within the Senior Project program was found the embodiment of Freire's (1998) ideology of spontaneous curiosity that requires guidance into the realm of epistemological curiosity.

Some findings of the Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994) study revealed increased collaboration among the faculty and staff at Hodgson. The administration of the school provided regular opportunities for the staff to meet and share feedback regarding Senior

Project initiatives. This responsiveness allowed for an increased sense of ownership for Senior Project. This feeling of ownership also provided a level of trust between teachers, as well as among teachers, administrators, and students. Students were furnished with opportunities to engage in learning experiences outside of traditional school conventions. This level of trust allowed students to negotiate their own learning through self-initiated field experiences.

As an administrator, I can say that it is risky to have students setting up field experiences and taking field trips during which educators are not directly supervising those experiences. Yet, I concur with the Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994) statement that when given these risky opportunities, students become more "knowledgeable and critical researchers" (p. 11). Trusting students to experience education outside of the watchful eyes of school personnel is difficult, especially when I realize that the community sees these students not only as boys and girls but also as representatives of the high school. Yet, critical education is a risky business that provides rich and rewarding benefits for students, educators, and the entire school. As with any worthwhile endeavor, great benefits often require a certain level of risk. This is a fact of life that we as educators need to practice, and our students need to learn.

Finally, Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994) reported that the public presentation component of Senior Project is the most powerful.

> The public presentation is the kind of incentive necessary to induce the struggle required for the construction of academic knowledge because it is an act of public accountability. Students come face-to-face with their judges and their actual work instead of participating in a proxy test of their ability to recall a test designer's definition of knowledge. They define their own knowledge by making the decision as to what to present and how to present it. (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 13)

For many students, standing in front of an audience, whether large or small, has always presented them with a level of personal risk. Hence, students struggle with finding their own voices through which to construct and express their knowledge and with fears of how to enunciate that voice before the community. Consequently, in successful presentations, the student and her/his evaluators are convinced that the student truly understood what s/he was presenting and had learned.

Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994) also referred to McDonald's concept of "planning backward" as a means to reshape high school curriculum. Furthermore, they cited the opportunities that Senior Project provided in collaborative teaching, integration of subject areas, alternative scheduling, and in the relationships that provide for successful experiences. Ancess and Darling-Hammond's (1994) statement, about students developing inquiring minds similar to what most students embody when they began their formal education as kindergarten students reveals that Senior Project has the possibility to renew enthusiasm in students who have been schooled not to engage in critical inquiry. McDonald's concept of "planning backward" embraces such reinvigoration. The concepts found in exhibitions or in Senior Projects refer to presentations that are designed to serve as a scaffolding from which to plan the curriculum utilized in grades other than the twelfth. In this manner, schools become places where critical pedagogy is practiced, and students are excited about learning rather than being conditioned to behave according to standardized expectations that promote generic molds with which to fashion students.

Prior to that momentous walk across the graduation stage that bridges the abyss separating childhood from adulthood, Senior Project has provided students with the opportunity to experience the wonderment of learning that has been repressed by

schooling experiences over several years in the public institutions called school. For many students, public school has repressed the excitement that once captivated them in kindergarten and first grade. Thus, as seniors were prepared to graduate, they were engaged in a powerful experience from which to embark upon the adventures and perils of the adult world where educators and parents no longer provide a net of safety and security.

In research on Senior Project implementation in one English classroom, Barbara Combs (1995) stated that Senior Project was more than an account of student-directed teaching and learning approaches. "Rather, it is a story of tension, frustration, confusion, and resistance. It is a story of reshaping an innovation to create a best fit for those who must make use of it" (Combs, 1995, p. 21). The nature of programs such as Senior Project has dealt with authentic assessment. These forms of assessment have created tension, frustration, confusion, and resistance as they were formed to fit the needs and expectations of the students, parents, educators, and community members who were involved with actual tasks of evaluating students and the educational experiences that schools provide.

Assessment of this nature must not be mandated or it will lose its ability to provide that "best fit" for those who utilize this form of assessment. Mandates will just standardize the assessment from a distance so far that the faces of learners and educators cannot be seen, and when the faces are not seen and the individual voices are not heard, then assessment becomes a futile exercise that is more managerial than educational. In fact, mandated assessment only serves to drive the schooling just as machinery drives a

factory to produce identical products for use in economic exploitation within a society patterned after a hegemonic ideology.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Rationale

My study focused on senior English classes as they were engaged in Senior Project as a culminating experience during their final year of high school. I utilized multiple methodologies that included a case study conducted as a participant observer within the framework of critical inquiry. As a participant-observer, I utilized my positions as an assistant principal to participate in lessons within classrooms, to facilitate field experiences for students, as well as to set up and manage Senior Boards. Each of these experiences proved data from individuals and from my own reflective practices. Within my case study, I utilized interviews, observations, and reflections as means of gathering data. Additionally, archived data was analyzed to provide a prospective that was broader than the scope of the 1999-2000 school year. My research has been written in the manner of a case study that makes a critical inquiry into the story of Senior Project at Salzburg Estates High School (SEHS).

My rationale embraces the use of case study under the guidance of critical inquiry. I chose case study as a research design because of the need to document Senior Project as it was implemented within a specific high school. Therefore, the case of Senior Project implementation at SEHS is the focus of my research. As a participant observer, I found that not only did I have easy access to data, but I also became engaged in the formation of Senior Project as it took shape within the curricular programs at SEHS. Critical theory

was utilized as my theoretical framework, so the ideology of critical inquiry drove my research as I examined the freedoms of students within a high school setting and the political power relations encountered by students, educators, and community members. Senior Project was viewed as a program that had social implications for the climate of the school, which included how the school interacted with the larger society of the Salzburg Estates community. The unfolding of the intricacies of Senior Project were examined and reported employing the concepts of critical inquiry.

Kenneth Sirotnik (1991) states, "Critical inquiry is at once empirical, explanatory, interpretive, deliberate, reflective, instrumental, and action-oriented...but it is more. To be critical, an inquiry must also challenge directly underlying human interests and ideologies" (p. 245). I used critical inquiry in my study as "a process for understanding and improving schools and schooling...a process of competent communication between and among communities of educators" (Sirotnik, 1991, p. 248). My research attempted to understand institutionalized schooling at SEHS and attempted to improve educational experiences or at least to challenge the perceptions of those experiences held by the entire schooling community. Through this research, I engaged in communication with the educators who embody the community of this local high school. That is, I allowed the voices of students, teachers, and community leaders to collectively become a community of educators who formed a body of critical knowledge. "Critical knowledge can assist with the problem of determining discrepancies between curricular ideals and practices and what could bring them more into alignment; critical inquiry yields critical knowledge" (Short, 1991, p. 20).

My critical inquiry studied the implementation of the Senior Project program at SEHS where I am an assistant principal. I attempted to examine the effects of the Senior Project program in providing students with freedom to base their studies on personal interest and to even exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without violating freedom from disruption as typically defined by institutionalized schooling and specifically defined by SEHS and its schooling community. In addition, I examined how the system of schooling and the hegemonic influences of society intrude upon critical pedagogy and critical inquiry. Furthermore, I investigated the possibility of Senior Project to disrupt the concepts of institutionalized schooling and to provide a pedagogy of emancipation that frees students and educators from intrusions.

Presently, Senior Project is in the third year of implementation at SEHS. During the 1997-1998 school year, one teacher implemented Senior Project with two college placement English classes consisting of 45 students. In the 1998-1999 school year, the number of seniors participating in Senior Project doubled with four college placement senior English classes implementing Senior Project involving 93 students. For the 1999-2000 school year, four college placement senior English classes, one applied communications class, and one basic level senior English class implemented, in some form, Senior Project. During the 1999-2000 school year, 150 students implemented Senior Project.

Research Design and Data Collection

My research design was a case study utilizing critical inquiry in order to reveal perceptions held by students, teachers, and community members as they interacted with Senior Project. I gathered data from students, teachers, and community members who

were involved with the implementation of Senior Project at SEHS. Interviews of students and teachers were recorded and transcribed. In addition to interviews, data was also collected from judges who served on Senior Boards. These judges recorded written comments on the rubrics used for evaluating students' oral presentations. Likewise, archived data that had been collected by SEHS, since the inception of Senior Project within the school, provided additional insight into the perceptions of the schooling community regarding this program.

From the students immersed in the Senior Project process, six students were randomly chosen and were interviewed twice, with the first interview averaging 23 minutes and the second interview averaging 15 minutes. The six students randomly selected from the 150 students who participated in Senior Project included two female Caucasians, one male African-American, and three male Caucasians. Three of these six students had chosen a college placement track high school diploma, and one student had chosen a vocational track high school diploma while two of the students had chosen both the college placement track and the vocational track diploma. Hence, these students represented a variety of career and college aspirations.

During these interviews, questions were asked concerning the freedom students had in the Senior Project process and how this process compares to previous experiences that these students have had during their years in high school. (See appendix B for a copy of questions used in these interviews.) In addition, I looked for any evidence that the Senior Project process allowed these students to think and experience learning outside of the institutionalized schooling experiences that they typically encountered in other classes. I also questioned students about their perceptions concerning activities during the Senior

Project process that could be considered disruptive. I proposed to discover these students' perceptions of who decides what is appropriate and what is inappropriate regarding a research topic for Senior Project. In addition, I attempted to learn how these students felt about the power-relations in this decision process.

Furthermore, I interviewed two English teachers responsible for implementing Senior Project. These interviews averaged 10 to 15 minutes and were conducted three times throughout the Senior Project process. (See Appendix B for a copy of the questions used in these interviews.) Two English teachers who were implementing Senior Project were interviewed to gain their perceptions of Senior Project in relation to teaching senior English without the Senior Project process. These interviews were more reflective conversations than formal audio taped interviews, which was an effort to gather information without creating a situation in which the teachers felt that they were being scrutinized by one of their school administrators. Yet, I acknowledged that there was a certain amount of reservation on the part of teachers who were interviewed by a supervisor. On the other hand, as an administrator, I brought a certain perspective to the interviews that an outside observer would not have. Before I began interviewing these teachers, I presented the interview process as a means through which data could be gathered that would assist in constructing a better Senior Project program and higher quality experiences for both the teachers and their students.

One of the English teachers was a veteran teacher who had been teaching for fourteen years. This was the third year that she had been implementing the Senior Project process. The other teacher was a second year teacher. During these interviews, I investigated the perceptions these teachers had concerning Senior Project in regard to

what is typically taught in English classes and specifically what is taught in senior English classes. I attempted to gather their perceptions about how Senior Project affects the total senior experience for the students involved in Senior Project. Questions also delved into what was considered appropriate for the Senior Project process, and how that may be different from what was appropriate in other classes. Furthermore, I inquired about these teachers' perceptions of who decided what was appropriate and what was inappropriate for a Senior Project study. Likewise, I attempted to discover why certain topics would be considered inappropriate for high school seniors to research and experience through Senior Project. Since these interviews were held as reflective conversations, the interviewing process was more informal in nature. These reflective conversations occurred throughout the Senior Project process.

One final set of interviews was held with two faculty members who served as Senior Project mentors for students. The interviews were held prior to Senior Boards. Following the format of the interviews with the two English teachers, the interviews were more conversational and notes were taken rather than the conversations being recorded on audio tape. These conversational interviews were between 10-15 minutes in duration, and each mentor was interviewed once.

My research examined how these mentors perceived students who were involved with the Senior Project experience. I intended to ascertain how these mentors perceived Senior Project as part of the typical high school experience. Furthermore, I questioned these mentors about any additional freedom that the Senior Project process may have provided these students and what value, if any, these freedoms may have had for these students. In addition, I attempted to reveal the perceptions of these mentors about how the

Senior Project experience allowed or did not allow students to think and experience learning outside of the traditional schooling experiences typically found in high school. My questions for these mentors attempted to discover their perceptions of who decided what was appropriate and what was inappropriate for a research topic as well as why certain topics and experiences were deemed inappropriate for high school seniors to research.

Furthermore, community members who served as judges of students' oral presentations, Senior Boards, provided written comments concerning their interactions with Senior Project. Judges on Senior Boards had been asked to write comments on the rubrics used to assess the oral presentations. These comments allowed me to investigate the perceptions of these judges in regard to Senior Project. Comments from judges provided a perspective from community members as well as from school personnel as they interacted with students who were presenting their experiences and research. These community members consisted of 43 individuals who were not employees of the school and 35 faculty/staff members from SEHS. Judges from outside of the school included 16 college professors from three local universities—Georgia Southern University, Armstrong Atlantic State University, and Savannah State University.

In addition to these judges, individuals from local businesses and corporations served as judges along with several political leaders and individuals from social agencies. A Georgia State Senator and Representative participated, as did a representative from a U.S. Senator's office. The county sheriff volunteered as a judge along with an individual from the American Red Cross. Other judges included the county's 4-H coordinator, representatives from the Georgia Department of Education, the county's Superintendent

of Schools, members of the local board of education, and administrators from other schools within the county. In addition, managers from fast food businesses, an engineer from the Army Corp of Engineers, executives from a local bank and a local aircraft manufacturer, retired business personnel and educators along with parents of students who were not yet seniors at SEHS volunteered as judges. Senior Project at SEHS also received media coverage on a local television news broadcast resulting from news personnel who assisted as judges. Likewise, reporters from local newspapers participated as community judges. Faculty/staff from SEHS also served as judges for students' presentations. These judges added a community perspective to Senior Project, and their experiences with Senior Project provided data that was broader in scope than could be obtained from students and English teachers alone.

Besides the interviews and data gathered from judges' comments, I observed and interacted with students, teachers, and community members throughout the implementation of Senior Project. My observations were recorded in a written journal and in a photo journal. These observations assisted in determining how much freedom students were given in choosing a topic for their research projects and in conducting research. Also a self-analysis examined how, as an administrator, I was able to allow students the freedom to experience learning that may exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without disrupting the educational environment. I questioned who decided what was appropriate and what was inappropriate, as well as why certain research was deemed inappropriate for high school students. Also, I went into senior English classes and taught lessons on narrowing research topics.

Method of Analysis

The notes from interviews were transcribed and a thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted. This analysis identified themes that were threaded through the comments of the interviewees. In addition, similarities and differences among the themes revealed by students, teachers, and mentors were analyzed. This thematic analysis provided a perspective from students involved in Senior Project, two teachers who facilitated Senior Project, and two faculty members who served as Senior Project mentors. A thematic analysis of judges' written comments from Senior Boards was conducted. These thematic analyses were enhanced by a content analysis and an analysis of fieldnotes taken during observations that I made throughout the Senior Project process. Even though I have given much time and space within this study to critical theory, I have found that the theoretical framework and methodologies of Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994), Combs (1995), Dewey (1900/1990, 1910/1997, 1916/1997) Egelson and Harman (1998) Gardner (1983), McDonald (1993) Noddings (1992) Sizer (1985, 1992, 1996) as well as Tyack and Cuban (1995) undergirded my methodology and the subsequent analysis of my research.

CHAPTER IV

SENIOR PROJECT AS ENACTED AT

SALZBURG ESTATES HIGH SCHOOL

Too often, high school students are found existing in the same circumstances as the characters in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Act II of the play begins with the acknowledgement that it is the next day, same time, and same place. High school students are found each day merely "Waiting for Graduation". Some of these students echo the words of Vladimir:

> Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not everyday that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally as well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflexion, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we know the answer. Yes in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—(Beckett, 1954/1982, pp. 51-52)

Students often exhibit feelings of being trapped within the high school existence. Social events, extra-curricular activities, and after-school jobs are just a few of the distractions that vie for high school students' attention and time. Many of these students express a longing for release from the status of teenager and high school student to the world of adults and adult activities.

Yet, many students show stress and frustration for long hours filled with repetitious routines acted out at the sound of bells signaling the beginning of school, the end of class, and eventually the end of the school day. This is a feeling also stated by Vladimir:

> All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which—how shall I say—which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning? We wait. We hare bored. No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness! (Beckett, 1954/1982, p 52)

With the implementation of Senior Project at SEHS, it is the hope of the faculty and staff that students are not merely "Waiting for Graduation" during their years in high school. Programs such as Senior Project are implemented as efforts of creating educational experiences for students rather than allowing them to sit idly in classrooms "Waiting for Graduation."

As I gather data for my study, I am reminded of the local essence of SEHS, which is a school in a rural county deep within southern Georgia. The fertile soil of this southern county produces more than a local society that was once based upon an agrarian economy. Cultural inheritances of the people who call this locale home have evolved and transformed over the years. As new residents change the landscape of this rural county with new subdivisions and new businesses, the rural culture of the county is also changing. It is more than just the "new blood" brought into the county by individuals who have migrated to the temperate climate of South Georgia that is transforming this county. Growth is cutting through this county with more than paved streets. Subdivisions and cul-de-sacs are developing where there once were tracks of timber and dirt roads. Salzburg

County is experiencing the exciting pains of growth and change—growth and change that challenges the leaders of the county to provide services, growth and change that even challenges the political positions of these county and school leaders.

Salzburg County is steeped in history that proudly acknowledges the pioneering spirit of German immigrants who sought to forge a good life. Today, immigrants from other states and from other countries now seek to do the same—forge a good life for their families in Salzburg County. While these modern immigrants may not be fleeing religious persecution, they are seeking a good life for themselves and their children in the vibrant southern sun of Georgia. Nestled between towering pine trees and under majestic oaks in which the Spanish moss gently sways in southern breezes, families still build their hopes and dreams. It is here, amidst this diversity of southern traditions and challenging growth, that potential exists for the children, families, and communities centered around the social, political, and economic institution of schooling.

When I was a child attending school in Salzburg County, my life consisted of the various and important events taking place within the schools. Now that I am an educator within this county, I still experience the very important roles that the schools play within the social life of the county. I am also a participant in and a witness to the other roles that the schools play in political endeavors, economic interests, and cultural interactions.

In a county that is bulging with growth, new schools are being built or added on to each year in an attempt to accommodate the influx of new students. In fact, SEHS is the second high school in the county and was opened for the 1996-1997 school year. With these new schools and new students, new educators are being hired to lead students into the 21st century. A challenge exists on the freshly painted stages of schooling in Salzburg

County—a challenge that asks, "Will the process of schooling undergo changes and growth as the county undergoes changes and growth?" This change must be more than numerical as in the number of students, educators, support staff, facilities, tax dollars and expenditures. Change needs to occur within the pedagogical philosophies, theories, and praxes of this school system. The depiction of Salzburg County is not that much different from many other localities across the United States. Many areas face these challenges of growth and change, and certainly all schools face the need to carefully transform their pedagogical pursuits from the circles of schooling to the possibilities of education.

As Giroux (1997) states, "Despite their differences, both radicals and conservatives alike have abandoned the Deweyian vision of public schools as democratic spheres, as places where the skills of democracy can be practiced, debated, and analyzed" (p. 119). U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley sees the need for schools to function as democratic spheres. In his Seventh Annual State of American Education Address, Secretary Riley stated, "So now is 'the right time' to set new expectations for American education—to continue our efforts to create a 'democracy of excellence' for all Americans" (Riley, 2000, p. 2).

SEHS is experimenting with a program that embraces a vision of learning stimulated by practicing skills of democracy and where students can debate and analyze the very system in which they spend most of their time—the school system. For students and many educators, school represents life, and therefore society is represented within these acts of living. As part of the lived experiences of students, educators, and community members, Senior Project is being implemented at SEHS as a new program.

Secretary Riley (2000) stated:

> One of the most immediate and promising areas of mutuality should be a close examination of the senior year of high school. This is an important time of transition for young people. Surely we can offer our young people some exciting and meaningful challenges between midterms and the Senior Prom. This is why I am announcing a new initiative we call the 'Senior Year Transition' project. We intend to work with the Woodrow Wilson and Mott Foundations to bring together university leaders, educators, parents, and yes—students too—to take a new and close look at the senior year of high school. (p. 16)

SEHS acknowledges the vital transitional nature of the senior year of high school. This year is vital because these students are culminating their public school learning experiences. As these students prepare to graduate from high school, they need to successfully make the transition from the world of teenage student into the world of adulthood. The school can also analyze how well these students perform during their senior year as an evaluation of the entire educational program in preparing students to reach the expectations that the schooling community holds for its graduates.

Planning for the initial implementation of Senior Project at SEHS began when I attended the SERVE Senior Project Institute in Charlotte, North Carolina, during the summer of 1997. The planning continued through the fall months of 1997. Finally in January of 1998, students were introduced to the Senior Project process. Throughout January students worked on proposals for topics, conducted initial research, and were informed about the remaining components of Senior Project. In February, topic proposals were returned, a field trip was taken to Georgia Southern University to utilize its library, and preliminary research in the media center at SEHS began. An outline of how Senior Project would be implemented at SEHS was submitted to SERVE during the 1997-1998 school year. The outline stated, "Students will be doing research in class on a weekly basis. The research paper is tentatively due on 4/7/98. Senior Boards will likely occur Tuesday through Thursday during the weeks of May 11-15 and May 18-22" (Archive

Data, p. 3). An examination of the first year of Senior Project at SEHS revealed that this implementation was essentially conducted during one semester.

During the next two years at SEHS, the Senior Project process was spread out over the entire year rather than during one semester. At the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, Ms. Peabody, a twelfth grade English teacher, submitted a calendar to me that outlined how she would implement Senior Project with her classes. One of the apprehensions English teachers have voiced about Senior Project concerns leaving out some of the literature that they teach. When asked about these concerns, Ms. Peabody answered with the voice of practicality and reality that has matured over her years as a veteran educator.

> Yes, you will leave out some literature, but that only means that you may teach fewer pieces of literature. I still teach Macbeth, but I no longer have my students do a Macbeth project. I still teach the "Canterbury Tales" and other important works from British Literature. I just don't teach as many of the works as I did before Senior Project. I have found that students need the experiences provided by Senior Project in order to be successful in college or in vo-tech or on the job. Learning how to write a research paper has always been part of high school English for students on the college track. Now they just choose their topics rather than having a topic assigned by me. I had gotten tired of reading papers on "The Tower of London" or on "Queen Elizabeth." With Senior Project, students are more excited about the research paper. Of course that excitement diminishes somewhat as they begin the work of researching and writing. But, it is much easier to get them started on this when they are excited about it. College professors who help judge Senior Boards consistently comment that this is what high school students need to learn. I believe that the trade off is worth it. Sure I don't teach as many pieces of literature, but I still teach literature, and students benefit from what they learn through Senior Project. (Fieldnotes p. 21)

According to the calendar that Ms. Peabody submitted in the fall of 1999, she did not begin working with students on their research paper until the last week of October. Since school began on August 16th, students were in class for two months before they began Senior Project, and during that time, they were studying British literature as well as

honing their writing skills. They continued studying British literature while working on Senior Project. Ms. Tinker's classes did not begin working on their research papers until December. With careful planning, teachers at SEHS have been able to balance the teaching of British literature with the necessary instruction required by Senior Project.

Currently, SEHS is making plans to adopt a form of alternative scheduling that will allow students to complete classes in one semester rather than two semesters. This presents some problems for Senior Project, yet given the fact that Senior Project has been completed at SEHS during a single semester, it is feasible to continue with Senior Project in some form even with the introduction of alternative scheduling. There has been some discussion about implementing Senior Project as part of a fifth required English class when SEHS initiates alternative scheduling (4x4 Block Scheduling) for the 2001-2002 school year.

By using the various components of Senior Project, traditional schooling practices are reshaped with critical pedagogical philosophies and theories. For the purposes of definition and at the risk of oversimplification, four components or phases will be identified within the Senior Project program. First, students choose a topic that reflects their personal interests and curiosities. The spontaneous curiosity of the students is utilized as a place from which educators can guide students into epistemological curiosity. "Even before attempting to discuss methods and tactics for the purpose of creating dynamic classes...the teacher must be clear and content with the notion that the cornerstone of the whole process is human curiosity" (Freire, 1998, p. 81). Senior Project allows students to become curious and to construct meaning from the depths of that curiosity. Now, the depths of a student's curiosity may change as the student is

challenged by critical pedagogical praxis. Freire (1998) speaks of educational experiences and states, "The exercise of curiosity makes it more critically curious, more methodically rigorous in regard to its object. The more spontaneous curiosity intensifies and becomes rigorous, the more epistemological it becomes" (p. 82). The teacher is the one who assists the student on a journey from initial spontaneous curiosity into the more rigorous epistemological curiosity. Once students enter the realm of epistemological curiosity, they can begin to construct knowledge, understanding, and meaning for themselves without having to memorize someone's impersonal and often, frivolous knowledge passed off as facts to be accepted without question and without any opportunity for deliberation or experimentation.

With the opportunity to choose a direction for educational experiences, students feel the excitement and responsibility of a democratic sphere that not only prepares them for graduation but also emancipates them from the confines of schooling. As an assistant principal, I rarely have an opportunity to step back into the classroom as a teacher, but during the process of choosing a topic, I make time to teach lessons on narrowing the chosen topic. Since I was an English teacher prior to becoming an assistant principal, I am able to draw upon my knowledge and classroom experiences as I interact with students in assisting them with their Senior Project topics. Also as an assistant principal, I am able to say to a teacher, "I will be in your class next week on Wednesday to teach a lesson on narrowing Senior Project topics." Thus far, teachers have not expressed any problems with allowing me to teach this class, and I do not approach this task as if I can do a better job with the material than the teacher does. I view it as an opportunity for students to see the school community working together rather than existing in isolation.

Giroux (1997) speaks of the factory-model culture of schooling and how skill and creativity that once characterized handmade items has given way to a fragmented process of work, in which creative invention is not part of the actual experience of creating. "One result was a fragmented work process that reduced labor to a series of preordained and lifeless gestures" (Giroux, 1997, p.8). Students need to see that school is not an exercise in learning skills that are isolated from one another, and what better way to teach this than with the example of educators collaborating with the educational experiences of students.

This opportunity allows me to stay in touch with classroom pedagogical praxes and to be more personally engaged with the interests of students. I am often amused by the diversity that some students express when asked what they are interested in studying for their individual research projects. One student who was a member of the school's football team, said, "I want to do something with football or with dinosaurs." I jokingly suggested, "Well, you could research Jurassic Football" (Fieldnotes, p. 11). This student is not unique in his diverse interests. In fact, a closer look at his suggested topics can reveal much about how high school seniors react to freedom of choice when it comes to proposing an area of study. A student, as a football player, may be captivated by football especially in the fall of the school year. Yet, the student may have never been allowed to combine fascination with extracurricular activities and the academic experiences that are sustained by the process of schooling. This student knew that dinosaurs and anthropology are acceptable areas of study within the academic classroom. Hence, this is why I believe that students who have not been allowed to bring their interests into the classroom will

hesitate or suggest two topics—one in which they may be highly interested and one they believe the system of schooling will find acceptable.

This is evident in the topic selection of another student. Kim, a star softball and basketball player, chose the Holocaust as her topic. The teacher working with Kim as her mentor asked her about the topic. Kim did not really know much about the Holocaust or have much interest in this topic. Therefore, her faculty mentor engaged her in a conversation about a topic that Kim was passionate.

> **Mentor:** Kim, why don't you look into something about softball?
> **Kim:** You think I can?
> **Mentor:** It depends on what angle you take, but I think you will find it more enjoyable if you are really interested in your topic.
> **Kim:** What can I research about softball?
> **Mentor:** Let's see. Since you are the pitcher, how about looking into the differences between fast and slow pitch?
> **Kim:** Yea, because in college, I'll have to play fast pitch, so this would help me out a lot. (Mentor Interviews, p. 2)

Kim proceeded with her research project in the area of softball because it was an area of high interest for her. In the beginning, she did not conceive softball as an area of academic study. This underscored the fact that schooling isolates learning from personal interests and from the lives of students. Senior Project can allow these disconnected aspects of education within schools to be linked by an educational experience—by individual research projects.

Students may change their topics within the first few weeks, which allows them to focus on something in which they are truly interested, and something that will hold their interest throughout a long project. I received similar advice as I pursued a topic for my doctoral dissertation research. It seems logical that if as a doctoral student I should

incorporate my personal interest into my studies, then high school seniors would also benefit from incorporating their personal interest into their studies.

In the beginning, high school students may choose topics that are too broad and need to be narrowed, or they may not see how their topic relates to other issues in life. When I am in the classroom helping students narrow topics, I give a brief overview of how to narrow a topic. Then, I begin on one side of the room and have each student tell me what s/he is proposing to research. This interchange of ideas between the individual student and me usually catches the attention of other students. At times, other students even give some help on how to focus a topic more narrowly. Again, this models collaboration and helps to demolish the isolation of learning and to build the shared-experiences of education.

An African-American student, Tony, who was one of the star athletes in our school, chose to study the life of Walter Payton. I am always leery about the simple biographical topic because the goal of this project is to get the student to do some in-depth research and not merely to replicate facts about someone's life. I immediately made public my apprehensions for topics that focus on someone's life history.

> I asked Tony, 'Why do you want to study the life of Walter Payton? Is there a reason other than he was a great football player?'
> 'I want to look at what he did for the community', he replied.
> I was delighted to hear Tony's proposed study and responded, 'So you want to look at the philanthropy or charity work he was involved with?'
> Tony seemed enthused by my acceptance of his topic as he proudly stated, 'Yea, Ms. Tinker says that she knows some people who lived in a housing project that he built in Chicago. She can help me get some information on that.'
> Astonished by Tony's proposed study, I interjected, 'That sounds like a good niche for your study. Class, that is what you want to find—an angle for your study that makes it personal and interesting to you and for the judges to whom you will present your project.' (Fieldnotes, p. 45)

Tony had surprised me. I thought that he merely wanted to give the statistics surrounding the career of a great athlete, but he had already thought of how this athlete had used his fame and fortune to give back to the community. In later talks with Tony, I suggested that he also look at the difficulties facing African-Americans, and how Walter Payton helped many African-Americans overcome some of those difficulties. Tony's topic revealed the potential for students to analyze social, political, economic, and cultural topics as well as injustices faced by many within our society.

Further examination of the topics chosen in Ms. Peabody's classes during the fall of 1999 revealed the varied interests of students. In her classes, students had most frequently chosen topics related to the medical field. Many of these topics were related to careers in medicine. A few of these students who had chosen medical topics wanted to study the medical research on a specific disease. But most of these students wanted to study a medical occupation. Did this reveal the economic nature of schooling, or did it reveal the fact that high school seniors are making decisions about college and future careers, or were these two considerations tied together in a complex manner? Also, students had chosen topics that included religion, tattoos, sports, music, legal issues, ecology, architecture, and women's issues. Did these topics reveal subjects in which teenagers are truly interested, or were they merely safe research topics chosen to please their academic teachers?

To underscore my pondering about these topics, I considered a very popular subject with teenagers—music. Generation X has not been the first teenage generation to be consumed with the mystical attraction of music. When I was a teenager, I listened to music that was questionable to the established authorities. When I attended the rock opera

"Jesus Christ Superstar," I had to cross a picket line of protesters who believed this musical performance violated the Christian values of the community. By examining the music topics chosen by seniors at SEHS, I gained a picture of how students are influenced by the hegemonic forces within schooling. Rather than study popular music, how music influences fashion and behavior, or how music is a form of protest and struggle, seniors at SEHS have chosen to study "the art of percussion," "the oboe," and "styles of playing the guitar." Each of these topics reflected a conservative research topic that is not controversial and does not represent a threat to the authoritative values of adults within the community.

In an effort to gain a broader perspective concerning topic selection, I looked at students' topics from the previous two years that Senior Project had been implemented at SEHS. Often, medical topics were chosen by students during these years. During these first two years, other students chose to study social issues. Several of these topics such as breast cancer, aids, codependency, and Rohypnol (the date rape drug) could also be grouped as medical topics. Yet, these topics also represented an effort on behalf of some students to grapple with social and political issues. Some students even made a difference within the community through their research experience. Students accomplished this by raising money for charities and participating in medical programs such as a bone marrow drive. Students have also researched and experienced topics such as day care centers, internal combustion engines, earthquakes, scuba diving, modern dance, hydroelectric pumps, school violence, web page design, desktop publishing, dolphins, and the legal profession—to name just a few topics.

Even though some students embraced socially relevant topics, most students seemed to choose topics that were either academically or vocationally acceptable to the established perceptions of schooling. I sensed that the struggle between what interests students, and what they believe may be acceptable to educators is part of the hegemonic influence of the schooling institution. This appeared to confirm that the freedoms within a school are certainly influenced by hegemonic forces that exert pressure on perceptions of students.

One topic chosen by a student, Brad, in Ms. Peabody's class revealed his struggle with a controversial social issue within Salzburg County and within the school system. Brad decided to research tattoos. Over the summer of 1999, the Salzburg County Health Department ruled that tattoo parlors constituted a health risk and would not be granted a license by the health department. The county commissioners agreed; thus banning tattoo parlors from the county. In addition, the school system adopted a dress code that did not permit students to have tattoos visible on their bodies. This dress code of course did not apply to the temporary tattoos depicting the school's mascot that cheerleaders sell to raise money. I cautioned Brad about merely writing a commentary regarding the regulations of the county and school system concerning tattoos. I also told him that he could not get a tattoo as part of his experiential project. As I did this, I realized that I was restricting his topic, and by doing so, I was furthering a type of hegemonic influence over his interests in this schooling experience. For, I knew that Brad would remember my words of caution as he researched and wrote about tattoos. Hence, Brad's research and project of a controversial topic was tinged with the conservative agenda of Salzburg County. My

exchange of ideas with Brad provided a picture of how the choices we make are directed by societal influences that are directed by political agendas.

> Cautiously I asked Brad, 'What are you thinking about doing for your experiential project after the research is completed?'
> Brad's eyes danced as he stated, 'I plan on video taping someone getting a tattoo.'
> My concerns about this topic intensified, but I tried to find a way to caution Brad without throwing cold water on his enthusiasm. 'Since our county has banned tattoo parlors, that is not a good idea. Your topic can be acceptable, but you have to handle it appropriately.'
> He quickly thought of an alternative to his proposed videotape. 'Maybe I can interview people with tattoos and some of the people who do tattooing in another county.'
> Brad's enthusiasm quickly engulfed me as ideas began to surface through my administrative concerns. 'You can also show some drawings of tattoos and give some of the reasons why people get them. Possibly, you could look at the religious significance of tattoos for people in other cultures.' (Fieldnotes, p. 37)

Brad decided to go ahead with his research of tattoos, but stated that he would keep Ms. Peabody and me apprised of how he would handle the experiential portion of his research project. At junctures such as these, I, as a school administrator, have attempted to allow students to exercise freedoms within the limits placed upon them by the community and the system of schooling. Parents, the school board, and the community hold expectations that students such as Brad receive an education that is appropriate according to the values of the larger community. While I knew that this was possible, I also realized that these restrictions play a major hegemonic role in shaping the experiences and values of students.

Another example of how students' choices were influenced by the hegemonic factors of schooling can be seen in Karen's two choices of possible topics. When it was Karen's time to reveal her topic selection, she stated that she had two topics of interest and could not decide which one to choose.

I asked her, 'What are the two topics that you are considering?'

> Hesitantly, Karen answered, 'I want to look at either women in the military or the dry-cleaning business.'
> The difference between these two topics struck me as humorous. 'Those are really two different topics. I guess you could tie them together because women in the military have their uniforms dry cleaned. You could choose either one. Let's see; what about women in the military interests you?'
> With a voice of uncertainty, Karen responded, 'I'm not sure.'
> I knew there had to be some reason why she had given those topics consideration, and I tried to find out what her interests were. 'Why do you think you want to look into women in the military? Do you want to look at their roles as soldiers, whether or not they should be in combat, or do you want to look at women in military schools such as the Citadel?'
> Karen was still skeptical as she stated, 'I don't know. I might look at their combat roles.'
> I did not want her to abandon a topic that she might find more interesting, so I redirected her attention to her other choice. 'Ok, What about dry-cleaning? What is it that interests you about it?'
> With less enthusiasm Karen said, 'I think I might look at the process of dry-cleaning, you know, how it is done.'
> Realizing that her lack of enthusiasm could be frustration about how to narrow this topic, I suggested, 'Well, that has possibilities even though it is a dry subject. How about looking into small businesses such as dry-cleaners.'
> Karen's lack of interest in dry-cleaning was beginning to become apparent. 'I don't know,' she stated.
> I suggested another angle to research in the area of the dry-cleaning businesses. 'Well, if you look into how to set up a small business and how easy or difficult it is for women to start a business, that might be good. Or, you could investigate how many small businesses including dry-cleaners are owned by women.'
> She seemed a little more interested in this suggestion and replied, 'Yea, maybe.'
> At this point, I realized that I needed to move on to other students and that Karen needed some time to think about her choices. 'Well, you might want to do a little research in the library and see which one really interests you the most. Sometimes, you can narrow a topic or decide on a topic by doing a little research first.'
> (Fieldnotes, p. 29)

Karen seemed to be interested in the roles of women in the military more than the dry-cleaning business. Her two topics represented a conflict between a topic that is controversial, especially in a rural southern county, and a topic that might be acceptable for a girl in this locale to research. I did not want to push her in either direction; she needed to make her decision based upon her interests, and it needed to be her decision not mine. After the class, I told her that either topic could be a good choice, but it depended

on how she handled it. She told me that the dry-cleaning topic just came to her as we were discussing topics. I told her that she could find enough information on women in the military to write a research paper, and that she could interview some women at a local army base or talk to one of the female recruiters who routinely visits the school. She seemed much more interested and relieved that this would be acceptable. Karen was, as other students were doing, hedging her bets. She gave two topics—one of interest to her and one that she thought might be acceptable. I am convinced that students when given freedom to direct their own studies are not sure if they really have the freedom to do so. When I shared with Ms. Peabody the belief that students may be unsure of the freedom that Senior Project provides them she wholeheartedly stated, "I agree completely with that" (Fieldnotes, p. 59).

In high schools, we have claimed that students have choices, or at least, we have said that they do. They are allowed to choose classes each spring during registration. But, these choices are made from a list of classes, and teacher recommendations are used to determine which choices are appropriate. Even the elective classes have provided students with only a very small choice. Hence when given an opportunity to choose a subject for in-depth study, students seemed to hesitate and were reluctant about their choices. This can be seen as the same for adults in our society. When my principal has asked me if I am willing to complete a task, I have not taken it as an option. I have seen it as being told to do something, so the principal is told what I believe s/he wants to here. How much of this has constructed the beliefs and values that we as a society claim to hold? Possibly, we have merely echoed what we believe those in power want to hear.

In Transformative Curriculum Leadership, Henderson and Hawthorn (1995) explicated four forms of deliberative artistry or practical educational wisdom: political inquiry, pedagogical imagination, critical reflection, and spheres of curriculum practice. When involved in political inquiry, we experience meaning making and pedagogical tact, which are the acts of doing and the action of taking a side on an issue. Henderson and Hawthorn (1995) based their study on the works of Van Manning and Noddings. Henderson and Hawthorn (1995) stated that pedagogical imagination involves educational activities that are emotionally and intellectually attractive or compelling. This was the basis of Freire's (1998) pedagogy of curiosity. Critical reflection encapsulated in both educational and cultural criticism as espoused by Greene (1988, 1995) can be seen in her analysis of problems found in human insensitivity and injustice. Spheres of curriculum practice have been explained as curriculum design, development, enactment in school life, and evaluation. Each of these areas reflected the influence of critical theory and should be what drives the pedagogical praxis of educators. If we are driven by such a praxis, then we should enact curriculum that frees students to make decisions about their studies—that allows them to break free from the hegemonic influences we may exert without actually realizing it.

In Senior Project, the topic selection was crucial to the remainder of the process, yet it was more than a procedural step; it was one that reflects pedagogical philosophies, theories, and praxes of educators. In his annual back-to-school address in 1999, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley focused upon high schools. Riley (1999) stated:

> Teenagers by their nature are passionate, creative, open to new ideas, and full of energy to discover the world around them. We need to find new ways to capture all of this positive energy, and we need to make sure that teenagers are part of the solution. (p. 2)

When given the opportunity to select topics for study, students need the freedom to be passionate, creative and innovative. Senior Project has allowed students the freedom to use energy in a discovery of the world—the world inside and outside of the classroom. Riley (1999) in his speech stated, "Senior year should be a well thought-out transition into adulthood with students being given increasing responsibility" (p. 11). Part of the transition into adulthood has always consisted of a struggle with the hegemonic forces of society and a struggle with interests that are as captivating as they are controversial.

Once students have selected their topics and presented a formal selection to their teacher for approval, which was certainly one reason students attempted to choose topics they believed were acceptable to teachers, they were ready to move on to the second phase of Senior Project. This consisted of the research paper, and it resembled the traditional research paper that has been assigned by twelfth grade English teachers for decades. In Combs' (1995) research on Senior Project, she commented on how the research paper phase of Senior Project appeared as if the project had been forgotten.

> For several weeks during October and early November, I thought that The Project had been abandoned...On the first Monday in October, Ann spent the period presenting a lesson on preparing note cards. She did not mention The Senior Project, but talked about writing and ordering note cards. (Combs, 1995, p. 140)

The research paper contained similarities to research papers that have been traditionally assigned by English teachers across the country. This represented just one phase of Senior Project, but it did incorporate pedagogical fundamentals that have been and are currently being used by educators who do not utilize Senior Project. I viewed this as a positive aspect of Senior Project. The manner in which children learn did not have to be completely rewritten for Senior Project. Rather, traditional methods were combined

with critical pedagogy in an effort to restructure our basic philosophy of schooling and our pedagogical praxes.

Students have often complained about Senior Project because they believe that without this project they would not have to write a research paper. I have had numerous discussions with students about this in the hallways and cafeteria. One such conversation with Buddy occurred in the cafeteria.

> Buddy called me over to his table at lunch. 'Mr. Winters, why do we have to do this Senior Project?'
> Recognizing Buddy's reluctance to be involved with Senior Project, I answered, 'It's an excellent learning experience for you.'
> Buddy was persistent with his objections, 'But, if we didn't have to do it, then we wouldn't be writing this paper.'(Fieldnotes, p 42)

Buddy's class had to turn in their research paper to Ms. Peabody the next day, which was probably why he was a little concerned about Senior Project and the research paper.

> I told Buddy, 'You'd still have to do the research paper even if we didn't require you to do Senior Project.'
> With surprise, Buddy questioned 'Really?'
> 'Yes, I had to write a research paper in high school. It was called a term paper then. The only difference is that topics were assigned to us or we had to choose from a list that the teacher gave us. So, you'd still have to write a paper even if you didn't have to do Senior Project. The topic might be the Tower of London or Queen Elizabeth's Reign.'
> Buddy began to realize that Senior Project was not adding the research paper to his senior year and that he preferred having a little freedom in choosing his topic. 'Uh, I'd rather choose my topic, than be told what to research. I don't mind the rest of Senior Project except for getting up in front of the judges to present. I was delighted to hear his change of perceptions about Senior Project, so I gave him a little encouragement. 'Well, when we get to that point [the formal presentation to Senior Boards], you will be ready and you'll do a great job, I'm sure.' (Fieldnotes, p 42)

Buddy's complaint about writing a research paper has been common for many of us when we have had to do something that has a deadline and that takes us away from other activities we would rather be doing. In Buddy's case, I was sure the writing of the research paper was taking him away from important socializing that has always

contributed so much to the high school experience. The amazing point in my conversation with Buddy was that once he found out that writing a research paper was part of high school requirements, he did not question it. He just accepted it. This has occurred with most students and teachers when faced with educational dilemmas—they have just accepted it as required. Too often, students and teachers merely accept what is required, possibly because they do not believe that they have the freedom to question the requirements that are mandated by others.

Another important point from my conversation with Buddy, which was typical of several conversations that I have had with other students, was that he preferred having a choice in selecting a research topic to having one assigned to him. Thus with the motivation of a personal interest, students began the research process. Interest was high at this point as students searched for sources of information relevant to their topics. One crucial element of this phase in Senior Project was the faculty mentor. Once students had chosen topics, they had to also choose mentors from the members of the faculty. These mentors had to be members of the faculty for very good reasons. Each faculty member has been through the experience of writing a research paper and has some knowledge about the process of gathering sources. Additionally, faculty members had other professional contacts that could serve as resources as the student progressed through her/his senior project. Ms. Peabody explained another excellent reason why faculty members needed to serve as mentors for the research paper. She stated, "If I give drafts of the research papers to teachers here at school, then I know that I'll get them back, for either I will go to their classroom and ask for the papers or I'll ask Mr. Winters to get

them" (Fieldnotes, p. 7). Hence, faculty members constituted a pool of mentors that was readily accessible to students and to the coordinators of Senior Project.

Mentors provided a variety of services to the students especially during the research gathering and paper writing processes. Mentors were encouraged to help students narrow topics, identify resources of information, and proofread a draft of the paper before it was turned in to be graded. During this process, students learned a great deal about teachers, for the role of the mentor is quite different from the role of classroom teacher. The first year that Senior Project was implemented at SEHS, students were assigned mentors based upon topic selection and an interest inventory completed by the faculty. The next year, students were allowed to choose their mentors, which was the procedure used during the third year of Senior Project at SEHS. By allowing students to choose their mentors, students were given another means of directing their own educational experience. Some students hesitated in choosing a mentor for such a long period of time that a mentor was eventually assigned to them. The following was a discussion that I overheard between Ms. Peabody and a parent in the hallway after school.

> In the main concourse of the school, a mother stopped Ms. Peabody and stated, 'I need to talk to you about Donnie's Senior Project.'
> Ms. Peabody, obviously caught by surprise, questioned, 'Is there a problem?'
> 'Yes, you told him that he has to find a mentor,' this mother stated with some irritation in her voice.
> Ms. Peabody attempted to take control of this awkward situation, 'I know, and he hasn't yet.'
> 'That's the problem. Donnie is shy, and he doesn't know who to ask,' the mother persisted with her objections to students choosing a mentor.
> Ms. Peabody attempted to explain the process and the help she had given Donnie, 'I've given him some suggestions of teachers to ask.'
> The mother began to soften her irritation as she realized that Ms. Peabody was attempting to help Donnie, 'I know; he told me, but he is too shy to ask.'
> 'Well, either he will ask someone or I will assign him a mentor,' was Ms. Peabody's answer.

> With relief, the mother acknowledged, 'That's what I wish you would do because Donnie has always been shy when it comes to asking people for help.'
> Ms. Peabody tried to convince the mother that students need to learn to be more independent. 'But, he needs to learn. What's going to happen when he graduates and has to ask for assistance on the job or in college.'
> With a somewhat embarrassed frustration the mother stated, 'I know, but could you just assign a mentor to him?'
> Ms. Peabody agreed, 'If he doesn't have one by tomorrow, then I will have to assign one.'
> With certainty the mother stated, 'I can tell you he won't have asked anyone.' (Fieldnotes p.63)

This discussion represents several important points. To begin with, students learn many experiences in school and specifically from programs such as Senior Project. Seeking help on projects is one of the lessons that cannot be evaluated on a standardized evaluation instrument, but it is an important lesson that is crucial to educational experiences. Also, Donnie's reluctance to ask a teacher to be his mentor is a reflection of the type of educational experiences that he has had throughout his years in school. Making decisions and acting upon those decisions seems to be a foreign experience to students such as Donnie.

For many students schooling has been embedded with experiences that require independent work and isolation of not only facts and learning but also of actions. Routinely, students have been given an assignment and are expected to complete that assignment without any outside assistance, for this would be considered cheating. Yet, the lack of collaboration means that students have not benefited from the experiences of others. Through Senior Project, mentors have provided guidance for students. Reading the research paper for errors was one way of showing students that all written work needs to be seen by more than one set of eyes before it is put into its final form.

During this study, just before students were to give their mentors a draft of their research papers, one of the teachers had a medical emergency that prevented her from

reading the papers of her protégés. I agreed to read the papers of the four students that Ms. Francis was mentoring. These papers will be discussed in more detail later. Faculty members serving as mentors read students' papers to check for errors and to see if the students were on track with the flow of thought and the research in the papers. This allowed students to make corrections to their papers prior to turning them in for a grade. The choice was left to the students of taking the suggestions given by the mentors, adapting, or rejecting the suggestions all together. In any case, the students were given guidance prior to being evaluated. Later on, mentors provided further guidance as students attempted to experience their research and engage in an oral presentation of their experiences.

To gain a perspective from students, interviews were conducted while students were working on their research papers. One of the areas investigated in these interviews concerned the guidance and assistance students received from their mentors. For the most part, these students revealed an appreciation for their mentors' guidance and assistance during Senior Project. Brad had praise for his mentor when asked, "Honestly, how much help has your mentor been?"

> Honestly, my mentor helped me a lot more than other ones. Cause he'd just give me different things like, just like, you know conversation. He'd say they used to do it this way. And he'd let me use the Internet in his class, and he'd go back and look over my shoulder to help me find different things. But when it came to like correcting my mistakes for the paper, he probably wasn't the best. But just like helping me find like different areas of my topic, he actually helped a lot. (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 5)

Brad had a positive experience with his mentor that he believed actually helped him with his narrowing of his topic, his research, and his writing of the paper—even though his mentor probably was not the best in correcting grammatical errors.

Additionally, Kathy had a positive experience with her mentor. When asked how much help her mentor had been she stated:

> Um, actually, I believe that I could have gotten a lot more help from my mentor. I could have utilized his resources a lot more, but I didn't because I've got a job and I've got a boyfriend. I got carried away in my own life, but you know he [my mentor] did help me. I'm very computer illiterate. He helped me find Internet resources and how to get around on the computer. He worked with me in the mornings before school. And I had him and um, Ms. Rinard, she gave me a lot of ideas for the presentation part. And I'll probably get back with her. I had Mr. Gonzolas as a mentor, and he's always worked well with me and gave me lots of ideas, and I worked well with him. He was my Spanish teacher last year. I could have gotten a lot more out of him. A lot of people didn't even pay attention to their mentor. I'm not going to say I paid the best attention or a great deal of attention to him, but he was there for me if I needed him. (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 15)

Kathy not only received assistance from her chosen mentor but also had another teacher, Ms. Rinard, give her some assistance. This revealed how much Senior Project was affecting the climate of the school through teacher-student relationships.

One student, Tara, was very uneasy about the mentor to whom she had been assigned. During the 1997-1998 school year, the first year of Senior Project at SEHS, students were assigned mentors; after that year, students were allowed to choose mentors and one was only assigned to students who did not choose. Tara did not want the mentor to whom she was assigned even though this teacher had personal experience with the topic that Tara had chosen—scuba diving. Tara even came to me asking that she be reassigned to any other teacher. I told Tara to meet with her mentor and then see how she felt about being reassigned. Tara met with this teacher and later reported that the teacher had worked in a positive manner with her, which was completely different from what Tara had experienced in this teacher's classroom. I believe that Tara had gained the experience of getting to know this teacher on a personal level rather than just as the

authority figure in a classroom. Tara was surprised with what she learned from this relationship.

In addition to working with mentors on campus, students were allowed to search for assistance off campus. This may have been a brief meeting with someone who had expertise in the area that the student was researching, or it could have been an extended relationship with an individual from the community who helped guide the student's experiential project.

While conducting research for their papers, students were given opportunities to discover that information was available in a variety of locations and venues other than the classroom and school's media center. For instance, Carrie chose "Art Therapy for Young Children" as her Senior Project topic. My wife teaches first grade at Salzburg Estates Elementary School, which is one of the schools that feeds into SEHS. For several years, my wife had wanted to start an art mentorship program involving high school students and her first grade students. Since several seniors were also art students, a perfect opportunity to set up such a program was realized. Carrie became an instrumental motivation in setting up this program. I worked with Mr. Corning, the art teacher at SEHS, in setting up release time for Carrie from his class once a week.

During this time, she and at least one other student traveled to the elementary school and worked with small groups of students in my wife's first grade class. Carrie was able to use information from this experience and guidance from an elementary school teacher in seeing how art education is implemented with young children. In addition, Carrie was supplied with books and articles on art in the elementary school as resources for her

research. Thus, Carrie's experience with a mentor reached beyond the walls of her school early during her Senior Project.

As part of the Senior Project process, students were constantly encouraged to utilize resources that they cannot find within the walls of the high school. Each year, seniors working on research papers have taken a field trip to Georgia Southern University, which is about forty miles from SEHS. While at Georgia Southern University, students spent the day utilizing the resources of Henderson Library. Then, students were encouraged to go back to the university and continue their research. For many students, this was the first time that they had access to such diverse research materials. Even though many students had Internet access at home and limited access at school, some of them commented that this was the first time they had used the Internet for research.

Just prior to Christmas holidays, Candice asked me if she could have permission to spend the day researching pacemakers at a local hospital. She had chosen cardiac surgery as her topic and wanted to use the hospital's library to do some research. She informed me that her mother worked at the hospital and could set up access to the medical library. I suggested that she spend time over Christmas break doing this research. Candice realized that this would be better because she would not be bound by the time constraints of a one-day visit to the medical library.

Another student, Susan, who was researching a rare disease, approached me in the hallway one afternoon following Christmas holidays. Susan wanted to know if she could have permission to miss one afternoon of school in order to go to the doctor with her sister. After questioning Susan about this request, I found out that her sister had the type of disease that Susan had chosen for her research topic. This trip to the doctor allowed

Susan an opportunity to hear what the doctor was telling her sister and an opportunity to question the doctor and possibly borrow some literature from the doctor concerning this disease. I immediately consented to Susan's request and set up the proper procedure for a field trip.

Carrie, Candice, and Susan represented students who have found that resources exist outside of the school for academic research. This has become an important ingredient of educational experiences in Senior Project research, which allows students to look beyond the school grounds for learning experiences that tie directly to academic course work. Also, students are given the freedom to encounter various avenues through which to gain understanding. Later, I will address how mentors continue guiding students in the other phases of Senior Project.

I stated earlier that I agreed to read the papers for the students Ms. Francis was mentoring. This opportunity gave me a chance to see how students were dealing with their topics in the research paper. The topics were varied, which does not surprise me since the interests of students were also varied. I expected the papers to be of a scientific nature since Ms. Francis is a science teacher at SEHS. The four topics included "Orthodontics," "Chemical Hazards in the Environment," "Infectious Viruses and How They Effect the Body," and "Streptococcus Unveiled." I also read one additional paper at the request of a math teacher Ms. Corning, who is married to the art teacher at SEHS, Mr. Corning. The topic of her protégé's paper was "What It Takes to be a Model." So while the protégés of Ms. Francis had chosen science related topics, Ms. Corning's student had chosen a topic unrelated to the field in which Ms. Corning taught. Ms. Corning was also mentoring one other student, Carrie. Carrie was the student who was involved with the art

mentorship at Salzburg Estates Elementary School. Hence, neither one of the students who chose Ms. Corning as a mentor had chosen a topic related to Ms. Corning's instructional area of expertise. Allowing students to choose mentors gave them the freedom to work with adults they respected regardless of what subject the adults taught. In addition, mentors were allowed work with students in areas that the mentor did not deal with on a daily basis.

Many of the students at SEHS seemed to value their mentors or at least value the proofreading that the mentors did. On each of the papers that I read for Ms. Francis's protégés, I wrote the following note on the title page:

> I have read your paper for Ms. Francis. She had a medical emergency in her family and was unable to read your paper. If you have any questions about the comments and suggestions that I have made, then see me. I will be happy to discuss them with you.

One of the students, Carl, left a letter with my secretary that he had written in appreciation for my proofreading his paper. Carl also stopped me in the hallway that week, shook my hand, and thanked me for reading his paper. Carl's letter and actions reflected how important some students view the help they received from their mentors. His letter stated,

> Mr. Winters,
>
> I would like to thank you for reading my research paper. I feel that your assistance will help dramatically in my final draft. I know my paper will not be perfect, but I know that with your help my paper can be the best it can. In many ways, this was an easy topic, and in the same sense, it was very tough. The information was so tough to come by. I enjoyed this topic because I take an interest in science and scientific issues.
>
> I would like to thank you on Ms. Francis's behalf. Thank you for helping out when she was in a pinch. I know you are a very busy man, yet you still help out the little man. That is the reason I respect you.
>
> Thank you so much,
>
> Carl Michaels

This letter divulged many feelings of students, or at least one student, about the assistance given by mentors in Senior Project. After receiving Carl's letter, I shared it with Ms. Peabody and asked if she had directed students to write such a letter. She was overwhelmed by Carl's demonstration of appreciation, which was not expected nor required. In his letter, Carl revealed why he chose his topic, which is because he takes "an interest in science and scientific issues." In addition, Carl wrote this letter in a style that reflected his personality. His use of phrases such as "for helping her out when she was in a pinch" and the sentence "I know you are a very busy man, yet you still help out the little man" exposed his flair and personality. This was not found in Carl's research paper. His paper was void of style, flair, and his personality. Yet as evident in Carl's thank you letter, he was capable of using style and personality in his writing. Therefore, he could have done so in his academic, research writing. Unfortunately, Carl and his classmates either did not feel that they had the freedom to write research papers with such personality, or even more sadly, they may not know how write a research paper in such a manner.

Another episode involving interaction between a mentor and a protégé transpired the same week that Carl expressed his appreciation for assistance. Ms. Peabody received a phone call from Jeffrey's mother concerning his paper and the help that he had received from his mentor, Mr. Hanson. Mr. Hanson had circled only a couple of words among the many words in Jeffrey's nine-page paper. Jeffrey's mother said that she could find several errors that needed to be marked on the first page of the paper. Ms. Peabody suggested that Jeffrey's mother call me, which she promptly did. Jeffrey's mother was careful to say that she was not complaining about Mr. Hanson but that she wanted Jeffrey

to receive the help that other students were receiving with their papers. I informed her that if Jeffrey would bring his paper back to Ms. Peabody the next morning, then I would have another mentor read over it. I also told her that the mentors in Senior Project were volunteering to help students. Acting as a mentor in Senior Project was not part of teachers' instructional duties and responsibilities. Jeffrey's mother again stated that she was not complaining about Mr. Hanson, but she only wanted Jeffrey to have the help he needed to successfully complete his research paper. This incident raises serious questions about the mentor component of Senior Project.

Two other mentors neglected to give the appropriate attention to their protégés' research papers. As an assistant principal, I spoke with both of these teachers and reminded them that students choose mentors, and that mentors agree to help students. Students are taught lessons about teachers and schooling when a teacher agrees to help a student and then fails to provide that help. I also made it clear to these two teachers that if they agree to mentor a student, then they are expected to provided appropriate and sufficient assistance to that student.

On the other hand, I have had mentors complain that some students did not meet with them and that some students do not seem interested in receiving assistance. Yet, other mentors have shared with me how their protégés came by their classroom weekly to ask questions.

Each year, Ms. Peabody has given me the names of a few teachers, four or five, who have not returned research papers to either Ms. Peabody or to the students. I go to these teachers and ask them about the papers. Usually by the end of the day, the missing papers have been marked and returned to either Ms. Peabody or the students. This year, as in the

past, Ms. Cavalier was one of the teachers who did not return the research papers for her protégés. Three students had asked Ms. Cavalier to be their mentor, and she had agreed. When I asked Ms. Cavalier if she had the research papers for her protégés, she said that she thought she had until the end of the month to finish them. This was on the nineteenth of January and the papers had been given to her on the thirteenth of January with a memo from Ms. Peabody that said mentors were to return the papers to Ms. Peabody by 3:30 on January 18th. Ms. Cavalier flipped through the papers saying that she had not even looked at them yet. She came across the memo from Ms. Peabody and commented about the return date of January 18th. The next afternoon, I retrieved the last of the papers from her; she had not looked at it. Ms. Cavalier may have been exhibiting resistance to Senior Project, but she was actually hurting students by not providing them the help she had agreed to provide them. Ms. Cavalier has made her negative feelings about Senior Project known to other staff members. She has made comments such as "Why should we do the work of the English teachers."

When the irony of her statements and actions came into focus, I remembered that she had asked me to read a paper she had written for a master's level class a couple of years ago. We all have valued the assistance of others. Yet, resisting an educational initiative by withholding assistance to students seemed more than unfair; it seemed unethical, especially given the fact that students seek out teachers whom they respect and admire to be their mentors. Ms. Cavalier did not typically exhibit this type of behavior in her classroom interactions with students. In fact, Ms. Cavalier appeared to have a good rapport with most of her students; she had very few problems with classroom management, and she had students requesting that she be their mentor. This leads me to

believe that her actions in regard to the research papers each year were a form of resistance or protest against Senior Project.

Unfortunately, Ms. Cavalier only hurt the students by reducing the time they had to work with the drafts she did not adequately proofread. She also damaged the respect that these students had for her when they asked her to be their mentor. Hence, the research papers and the interaction between mentors and protégés revealed a great deal about both educators and students. I know that this type of learning was not originally designed as part of Senior Project, yet it is certainly part of the critical pedagogy fostered by Senior Project.

As I reflected on reasons why mentors might provide inadequate assistance for their protégés, I realized that it might not be a form of resistance to an educational initiative. Mentors could have felt inept in reading and marking papers that would be graded by a veteran English teacher. In fact, Ms. Peabody had the reputation of being an excellent grammarian; our principal, Dr. Holden, had made it known that he frequently had Ms. Peabody read over his memos and letters for corrections. There may have been some apprehension in some teachers about marking a student's paper that would eventually be graded by the infamous red pen of Ms. Peabody. The mentor could have seen a failing grade for a protégé on the research paper as also being a failing grade for her/himself. At times teachers have been questioned by themselves and by others concerning students who fail under their pedagogical guidance. The question has been asked numerous times, "When a student fails, has not the teacher also failed?" Could the unwillingness of Ms. Cavalier, Mr. Hanson, and others to provide quality mentorship in regard to the research paper have been an act of resistance, or could it have been an act of reluctance due to

feelings of inadequacy regarding their writing abilities? This pondering underscored the complexity of humanity, which has been compounded many times within schools by the number of individuals within them.

While studying Senior Project, I became acutely aware that the research papers of students revealed various levels of ability in the area of writing. The papers that I read had the typical errors in grammar and sentence structure, but the papers also lacked the insight of personal interest. These papers had no flair or style that revealed the student's personal interest in the topic. In fact, these papers seemed dry and seemed to cater to what the students might expect the teachers wanted to hear. Again, this could have been from students not having experience with the freedom to write a formal paper in a personal style that reflected personal interests. The freedom to act and to think appeared to be something that these students were hesitant to do out of fear that they really did not have such freedom, or possibly they have never experienced such freedom and did not know how to use it. In either case, it was evident that students need to experience this freedom to direct their studies prior to Senior Project.

Ms. Peabody and I have discussed the need for students to have more instruction, prior to their senior year, on the research process including making note cards, creating bibliographies, citing sources, and using both primary and secondary sources. This was painfully clear as I read the research papers of Ms. Francis's protégés. In these papers, citations were not correct, the manner in which they were made varied throughout the papers, and bibliographies were incorrectly formatted. This was in spite of the fact that I have observed Ms. Peabody instructing students how to make citations and format bibliographies. I have seen the handouts filled with examples on how to accomplish these

tasks. Apparently, these students did not refer to these examples. Certainly, high school students need to gradually learn how to conduct research and write research papers before their senior year.

Yet, the issue of style and personality in the students' writing cannot be neglected. From my experiences in the classroom, I knew that students could express an individual flair or personality through writing. High school students have constantly experimented with style and personality. This became evident by spending time with teenagers. One day a student may have worn sandals, shorts, and a Hawaiian shirt while the next day that student may have worn Tommy Hilfiger slacks, a button down shirt, and a tie, and the next day that student may have come dressed in blue jeans, T-shirt, and boots. As I thought about this, I realized that it was not much different than with many adults or at least with the teachers at SEHS. Many people have expressed different styles and usually enjoy doing so. The need to find a way in which students can do this in their academics and even in their writing of research papers has existed for many years in high schools. I believe Senior Project has provided such a potential, but work must be done on the part of the educators who guide students through this experience.

As I looked at the research paper requirements that were handed out in the senior English class, I saw that there was room for style and pizzazz. There were three requirements, which included a minimum number of notecards, a minimum number of sources, and a minimum number of direct quotes. There were thirteen types of sources listed from which students could obtain information and there was a grading system that listed content/organization, grammar/mechanics, and research elements. Within these traditional requirements, there was certainly room for style, flair, zest, energy, and

creativity—the emotions which many teenagers enjoy displaying. Sadly, many students have not experienced putting themselves into academic endeavors, which would result in the type of style that separates perfunctory writing from writing that leaps out of a person's interests. This type of style sets students apart from one another and sets average writing apart from extraordinary writing. The handout given to students at SEHS outlining the research paper requirements stated:

> The requirements listed below are minimum requirements for the research paper portion of the Senior Research Project. Just meeting the minimum requirements does not guarantee you a passing grade. Failing to meet the minimum requirements, however, does assure you of failing designated portions of the assignment. (See copy of handout in Appendix A.)

It seemed that style, zest, and creativity are what lifts a paper above the minimum requirements more than having extra pages, sources, and quotations would have done. In order to accomplish this sophisticated type of writing, students needed to have experience with sophisticated spheres of thought. This underscored the need for a more critical pedagogy that will extend students' thinking and writing into such spheres. To accomplish this level of education, students need experiences that promote sophisticated spheres of thought prior to twelfth grade.

Writing in school has been accomplished by students through different formats and for different purposes. Typically, students have either written for themselves, which has often taken the form of a note or letter, or they have written for their teachers which took the form of a report, essay, research paper, or the dreaded writing assignment for punishment. Between these two major types of writing existed a chasm across which students and often teachers have difficulty erecting a bridge. For, how could the interests of students as exhibited in their notes and letters have any bearing on the type of writing

required by the process of schooling? One type required creativity, expression, and personality while the other required compliance, standardization, and mechanical reproduction. Senior Project has attempted to bridge the chasm between student interests and the interests of schooling. This was a part of Senior Project during the writing of the research paper and during the activities in which students go out into the community to experience their research.

Senior Project embodies more than choosing topics and writing traditional research papers. After choosing topics and writing research papers, students began the experiential phase of Senior Project. During this phase, students ventured out of the confines of the school and out from under the watchful eyes of teachers and school administrators. During the topic selection phase of Senior Project, students were encouraged to choose topics that would enable the students to be engaged in creating a product or in some manner experiencing what they had researched. Frequently, this placed students in the community working with adults who were not school employees. This process required students to seek out individuals from the community who were willing to help them experience what they had researched. Doctors, lawyers, college professors, business people, engineers, politicians, mechanics and other community members have helped students take the knowledge gained from academic research and have helped them see how that knowledge applies to life outside of the schoolhouse.

Each student must present documentation of a quality experience that was an extension of the research paper. A rubric with six elements had been created for evaluating this experience. The two most important elements of this rubric were the documentation that the student had spent the required hours on the project and that some

physical evidence of the project had been provided on an assigned date. These two elements comprised half of the points students could earn on this rubric. The other four elements combined to form the rest of the points.

During the first year of Senior Project implementation at SEHS, Charles had researched hydroelectric pumps and had written a superb research paper on this topic. He asked me if I could help him contact an engineer with experience in hydroelectric pumps. This was his plan A. We contacted a couple of sources including a local electric company. Charles developed plan B when plan A did not produce any assistance. Plan B included contacting the school system's vocational supervisor and the college of engineering at a local university. Charles's plan B failed to produce any substantial assistance. Charles was frustrated, and the deadline for completing his experiential project was rapidly approaching. Plan C was developed out of frustration and dedication to completing his project. Charles went to the public library and researched the building of a small hydroelectric pump. When he finished this research, he built the pump, which actually worked and provided electricity to power lights connected to it. Charles learned some great lessons during this experience. These lessons were ones that come from life and living. Many high school students have not experienced such lessons until after they have graduated from college. The value of Charles's lessons could not be measured or evaluated, but this did not mean that they were insignificant in his education.

Another student, Lisa, began to search for an experiential project that would stretch her knowledge gained from her research paper on breast cancer. Just that week, I had received a request from the American Cancer Society for our school to be involved in a walkathon to raise money. The minimum amount to raise was listed as $1,000. When

Lisa came to my office to seek suggestions about her experiential project, I suggested the walkathon to her and gave her the name of the woman to contact. Lisa made the contact and began to raise money. She and a group of her friends raised slightly more than the $1,000, and they participated in the walkathon. On Senior Awards Night, a representative from the local chapter of the American Cancer Society presented Lisa with an award for her charity work with the society. Certainly, Lisa learned more than the information she incorporated in her research paper.

The spirit of volunteerism or philanthropy cannot be merely taught through courses mandating that students spend time engaged in community service. Yet, out of the personal interests of students, the authentic spirit of compassion and activism can be ignited within students.

Another occurrence of this type can be seen in the experiences of Millie and her Senior Project. Millie had chosen to research leukemia. After writing her paper, she decided to be involved in a bone marrow drive. She could not locate one within southern Georgia at that time, so Millie drove to Charleston, South Carolina, where a bone marrow drive was to be held on a Saturday. She went prepared to videotape participants and interview them. When she arrived in Charleston that Saturday morning, she discovered that the bone marrow drive had been cancelled. The drive back to Salzburg County was filled with disappointment for Millie, and she could have shared her experiences on the failed bone marrow drive as her experiential project. Yet, Millie persevered in finding an experience that she felt represented her interest in leukemia.

The next week she contacted a local hospital and scheduled to donate her platelets for leukemia patients. Millie shared with us her experience of giving platelets, which

requires removing platelets from the donor's blood. This process lowers the temperature of the blood as it is pumped out of the body into a machine and back into the donor's body. The chilled blood reentering the donor's body lowers the body temperature and sends the donor into uncontrollable shivers even after being covered with multiple blankets. Millie sought out an experience that taught her more than she could have learned by only writing a research paper. She learned from her experiences and, as with Lisa, other people benefited from her educational experiences.

What requirements placed upon pedagogy and curriculum enable them to become part of educational experiences? To learn about humanity, its frailty, its delicate condition that endures at times only out of the generosity of others, was a lesson that was learned by some students in Senior Project. And once learned, this lesson has made not only better students, but has transformed students into compassionate members of society. These were lessons that defy being captured on a lesson plan form that lists tasks completed in linear fashion with a quantifiable testing experience standardized for all students. These were lessons about life and about how to live it, relish it, and improve it.

Experiences that made the senior year of high school more than the last year of the K-12 schooling routine were the hallmark of Senior Project. These experiences were often not possible without the guidance of a compassionate and wise mentor. For Hope and her mentor Ms. Donne, this was the case during the 1998-1999 school year. Hope was easy to identify as a radical teenager by her appearance. Her long blond hair and pale white complexion contrasted the black clothing, lipstick and eye shadow that she wore each day. When she spoke, her tongue ring was evident as it clicked against her teeth. Hope was attempting to be different and refused to allow established dress codes to

dictate her personal style. Hope expressed an interest in law especially constitutional law, which probably came from her strong sense of justice and equality.

One day, Hope came into my office and demanded that she be given a detention for talking in class. This was the first time, and thus far, the only time, that a student had requested punishment. I asked Hope why she wanted a detention. Her response was that the teacher, Mr. Thomas, had referred several students to the office for excessive talking and general class disruption, but these were not the only students talking and disrupting class. Hope felt that she was as guilty as the students who had received punishment. I told her that if Mr. Thomas wrote her up, then I would deal with her. This did not satisfy her; she demanded that I punish her because that was only fair to the others in the class. Hope persisted until I assigned her a detention. Certainly, Hope was motivated by a strong sense of justice. Her choice for a research topic was obviously motivated by this sense of justice.

In addition to her appearance and strong convictions, Hope was struggling to remain in high school without emotional and financial support from home. She was the adult in her family, which consisted of her mother and herself. Hope paid the bills with what little money came into the household. There was no one at home who made sure Hope came to school; in fact, Hope could have dropped out of school without anyone at home trying to stop her. Yet, she worked hard to stay in school. Hope had transferred into SEHS during her junior year, but she lacked the credits to graduate with her class unless she went to summer school and took some correspondence courses. Fortunately for Hope, she chose Ms. Donne as her mentor for Senior Project.

Ms. Donne took Hope under her wing and began to work with her. Early in the year, Hope expressed a desire to attend Mercer University, a private university in Macon, Georgia. Ms. Donne helped Hope with arrangements to tour Mercer University along with some other students who were going on a college day. Before leaving for her college day at Mercer University, Ms. Donne advised Hope to dress appropriately and to remove her tongue ring for the day. Upon returning from Macon, Hope was even more determined to finish high school and attend Mercer University as a pre-law student. Ms. Donne worked with Mr. Thomas, who helped Hope secure funding for a correspondence course and for summer school, so Hope could graduate during the summer of 1999.

For the experiential phase of Senior Project, Ms. Donne put Hope in contact with an assistant district attorney in a nearby city. Arrangements were made for Hope to spend the day with this attorney. When I heard about this, I suggested that Hope take a video camera with her to record this experience. A few days before Hope was to shadow this attorney, a problem arose. She had no transportation. I talked with one of the media specialists at SEHS, and she agreed to transport Hope in the driver's education van and to videotape the day's activities. I later found out that Ms. Donne had even made sure that Hope had money to buy lunch while she was with this attorney. And of course, Ms. Donne's advice about removing the tongue ring was also given and followed by Hope. Everything came together for this student because of the support provided by her mentor. Ms. Donne later said:

> Hope was so excited about this experience. She came back from her day with the assistant district attorney so thankful of the support she had been given. She said that she left the school feeling as if everyone was cheering, 'Go Hope! Go Hope! You can make it!' This meant a lot to her because she had not experienced this type of love and support from her family or her school before. (Fieldnotes, p 55)

Ms. Mead, the media specialist who went with Hope, said:

> Hope couldn't believe the size of the law library. She kept saying that she wanted to go back and read as many of those books as she could. She talked nonstop all the way back to school. Her excitement and her gratitude were enormous. (Fieldnotes, p. 53)

Hope's experience was extraordinary and would not have been possible without a program such as Senior Project and without the support of a mentor such as Ms. Donne. Hope graduated from SEHS during the summer of 1999, and was accepted at Mercer University. The financial hurdle that stood between Hope and Mercer University was also successfully navigated with various forms of financial aid.

For the experiential phase of Senior Project, students have learned much more than can be taught in the classroom regardless of the teacher, textbook, or technology that is used. Some students secured release time from school that was similar to a field trip. I handled the permission forms and other procedural arrangements. Students were involved in contacting individuals from the community to assist them with their Senior Project experience. Time spent with the experiential component of Senior Project must be documented on a form along with the signatures of individuals who have assisted the student or who can attest to the time spent by the student on the project. Not all students have chosen to take advantage of my offer to allow release time from school. Yet, all students were required to spend time in an experiential project either during the school day, after the school day, or on weekends.

In addition to the experiential projects already discussed, students have chosen to embroider a jacket, rebuild an automobile engine, take a hunter safety class, shadow a doctor during cataract surgery, shadow teachers, visit a television production company, as well as diverse other experiences. The opportunities have been endless for students to

actually see how what they had researched was put into practice within their community. Lonnie gained one unique perspective on laser surgery for the eye when he viewed my eye surgery in the fall of 1998. Jennifer choreographed the dance routine for the Miss SEHS Pageant in 1998. This allowed her to put into practice her love for dance and her talent. In addition, Jennifer helped one of her classmates, Becky, who had researched ballet and wanted to learn a modern ballet dance. Since her graduation and enrollment in college, Jennifer has returned to SEHS in 1999 and 2000 to choreograph the dance numbers for the Miss SEHS pageant.

Other students have constructed models representing some aspect of their research. For instance, one student created a scale model of a day care center; another student represented the damage created by an earthquake in a model that showed the damage from the epicenter outward. A young lady built a model of a pyramid with a cut-away section revealing the contents of the various chambers. One young man built a replica of Shae Stadium the "Home of the Yankees." As this student was quick to point out, he used "real baseball dirt for the infield." Another young, sports enthusiast designed lighting for the athletic fields at SEHS, and since we were a new school, we had not yet erected lighting in this area. Students have staged a fashion show, written and directed a one act play, and this year one student learned to direct the SEHS Chorale in preparation for a performance. This performance was part of the student's Senior Boards.

The experiences of students during their Senior Project are limited in two ways—approval from the school and their own creativity. Not all proposed experiences are approved. Anything that could be potentially dangerous to students or to property is not approved. Similarities can be drawn between this approval process and the institutional

review boards at universities, which oversee all research, even the research performed for this dissertation.

Topics that have raised concerns about their appropriateness have included cults, school violence, and date rape. In all of these cases, students have, with guidance, been able to find acceptable methods with which to handle these topics. Thus far, students seem to recognize that they must abide by the guidance of their educators. This willingness may be a result of the knowledge that their grades and pending graduation were in jeopardy if they did not heed the directions of their teachers and administrators. On the other hand, their willingness to be guided by their educators may have come from the respect they hold for their teachers as mentors and not just as instructors.

One topic that caused alarm for me was pyrotechnics. Matt chose this topic and appeared very excited about it. He originally proposed to stage an explosion in a field behind his house and videotape it. He assured me that he had his parents' permission to conduct such a project. I informed Matt that he would not be allowed to do this project, but he could still do something with pyrotechnics. I suggested various experiences that he could be engaged in as part of his experiential project. Eventually, Matt chose to join a volunteer fire department as part of his senior project experience. I proudly approved of his choice, which not only provided a learning experience for him but also gave back to the community. After Matt completed his research paper, he asked me about conducting an experiment as part of his oral presentation. As I held my breath, Matt explained the experiment that used tin foil, two straight pins, and a match. Matt's mentor happened to be a science teacher, so I told Matt to discuss this experiment with her and to make sure

he could explain the scientific principles behind the experiment. His excitement was contagious, for I found myself looking forward to hearing more about his experience.

Another student, Brad, who was researching tattoos approached me in the hallway during class change one day after Christmas holidays. Brad rolled up his pant leg and revealed a large tattoo of a sunflower on his thigh. I reminded Brad that getting a tattoo as part of his experiential project had not been approved; in fact, he had been explicitly told not to get a tattoo as part of his experience. Brad said he knew that. I asked him if his mother knew about his tattoo. Brad's response still worries me. He said, "Not yet." I realized that his mother could see Brad's tattooing experience as being sanctioned by the school. This has been one of the risks involved in allowing students the freedom to experience Senior Project. Yet, I believed that without risks we will not educate students; we will merely school them for twelve to thirteen years.

Educating children and teenagers has not been a neat, orderly venture. Sometimes it has been messy, chaotic, and risky; yet life is messy, chaotic, and risky. Students have learned the lessons of life best through educational experiences that occur in an atmosphere that embraces life. If that atmosphere were also filled with compassionate, dedicated teachers who mentor these students, then the risks were minimal, and the rewards were great (Noddings, 1992).

Finally, seniors began preparing for what many of them say is the most dreaded portion of Senior Project—Senior Boards. During this portion of Senior Project, each student prepared a ten to twelve minute speech and used visual aids during that speech. This presentation was made before a panel of judges. The judges were community members and school personnel who were invited to spend from an hour to an entire day

at the school evaluating these presentations. Politicians, including a mayor from a local town, a Georgia State Senator and a State Representative have served as judges. Business leaders such as lawyers, bankers, real estate brokers, small business owners and managers have served as judges. Professors from local universities and technical schools have volunteered their time as judges. Media personalities including news anchors, sportscasters, and meteorologists have served as judges. Engineers from local corporations have volunteered their time, as have various other individuals. Some teachers have volunteered their spouses and family members to serve on Senior Boards. Each year, I have received requests from individuals who want to return as judges that year or who have heard about Senior Project and want to serve as judges for the first time on Senior Boards.

During the 1997-1998 school year, the first year that Senior Project was implemented at SEHS, Ms. Peabody expressed concern about the oral presentations. This was a very risky portion of Senior Project because during one week in May, sixty to seventy community members entered our school and evaluated seniors at what we hoped would be a display of knowledge and expertise. As in the early days of television, we realized that a live performance was risky business. We could not edit or revise these performances. Yet, Senior Boards have proven to be the most rewarding component of Senior Project.

During that first year, Ms. Peabody revealed her concern about preparing students for a formal presentation that included visual aids. Fortunately in Salzburg County, we had an expert in this area. Ms. Edwards had served as the county's 4-H director for over twenty years; she had earned a reputation as an energetic, enthusiastic speaker and an

educator who helped 4-H students learn how to give energetic and enthusiastic presentations. I contacted Ms. Edwards and she quickly agreed to help us give our students a rudimentary lesson in presentations and in preparing visual aids. As students labored on their presentations and visual aids, we realized that Ms. Edwards and 4-H had proven to be an invaluable resource. Ms. Edwards was so impressed with Senior Project that she shared with her colleagues in Atlanta how SEHS was implementing Senior Project. In addition, Ms. Edwards has continually found opportunities to applaud the efforts of students and educators at SEHS in regard to Senior Project.

One of the most beneficial resources that Ms. Edwards has supplied is teaching students how to create impressive visual aids. Students have taken these lessons to heart as they create three-dimensional posters that glitter and shine. I never knew that Velcro could be used to make a very effective and interactive visual aid. Additionally, props and costumes are utilized in many of the presentations. I have been amazed to see the difference between a poster and a three-dimensional visual aid that comes alive as the speaker adds words and pictures to it with the miracle of Velcro. Many students used videotapes, audio tapes, and PowerPoint presentations, but it was the handmade visual aid that impressed judges with the amount of effort and professionalism students were putting into their presentations.

Poise and self-confidence have always been qualities that many have stretched to reach, but some have never quite grasped. This was true with students as they presented before Senior Boards, yet with the guidance of mentors such as Ms. Edwards, students were realizing that they could be poised and self-confident. The ability of teenagers to shine before adults and to answer questions, as adults, has been an important plank in the

bridge that spans the chasm between being teenage students and being adult high school graduates.

During Senior Boards, the hallways were buzzing with activity as students with their visual aids, notes, props and sweaty palms stood by the door of presentation rooms. With beads of perspiration on their furrowed brows, fidgeting students anxiously waited outside the presentation rooms shifting their weight from foot to foot and wiping sweaty palms on their clothing. Deep sighs were heard from students entering the presentation rooms and from students exiting the same rooms. As I stood in the hallway observing this somewhat chaotic buzz of activity, I began to detect the subtle differences between the sighs of anxiety and the sighs of relief.

This was the grand finale of the students' Senior Project experiences. Research papers had been graded and returned; hours had been spent with mentors working on projects; now, the last hurdle awaited these students. Each student wondered what the judges would be like. Would they be kind and respond in a jovial manner, or would they be harsh and attempt to trip-up the student? For the most part, these judges were kind and sympathetic to seventeen and eighteen year olds as they presented to a panel of adults. In fact, many of the judges were impressed with the fact that high school seniors were able to stand in front of five adults and speak on a subject as an expert who had conducted in-depth research. The frenzied atmosphere that students experienced was also experienced by teachers, mentors, administrators, and secretaries, as we attempted to schedule these boards and guide students through the emotional maze of publicly displaying their knowledge and abilities.

Preparations for Senior Boards were hectic, and they required a great deal of organization on the part of my secretary Ms. Devons. She kept a master schedule listing the presentations and the judges for each presentation along with the rooms where the presentations were to be held. Changes were made constantly as some judges arrived at the wrong time or cancelled at the last moment. Ms. Devons was quick to recruit a teacher who was on her/his planning period to fill in where a vacancy had materialized. She recruited ninth through eleventh grade students to help with a sign-in table for the judges and to direct judges to a hospitality room. Students and staff in the home economics and special education departments helped maintain the hospitality room. During the week of Senior Boards, more than just seniors and twelfth grade English teachers were involved in these presentations.

Judges for Senior Boards were provided with a rubric for evaluating the presentations. (See copy of this rubric in Appendix C.) This rubric was based upon a five-point scale for evaluating each presentation. A five represented outstanding and a one represented serious flaws. There were four descriptors on this rubric, which included knowledge of content, presentation format, delivery and sense of audience, as well as impromptu questions. Judges were also encouraged to write comments about the presentations on this rubric. The points and the comments given by the judges were shared with the students as a form of evaluative feedback. This feedback from judges was important to the educators who would implement Senior Project for the next group of seniors and for the students who had battled the anxiety and the fear of public speaking.

Many students commented about the fear of speaking before a panel of judges. This fear and anxiety made Senior Boards a transitional experience in the lives of these

students. Senior Boards served as a rite of passage for students as they became adults. There was a type of pomp and ceremony within the format of Senior Boards, but unlike the graduation ceremony, Senior Boards also allowed students to demonstrate the knowledge, skill, and abilities that the community expects high school graduates to possess. During Senior Boards, the SEHS community was able to grasp the value of such experiences that revealed the complexity of the transition into the adult world. Kessler (1999/2000) comments:

> [I]n our culture, teenagers experience not one but several passages: the major transformation of puberty; a challenging transition as they leave middle school and enter high school; and the completion of high school. Each is a time of enormous change—for students, families, and faculties. Students must say good-bye not only to relationships with others, but also to a childhood self...But along with the turmoil comes an exciting awakening to the possibility of larger purpose and deeper meaning in life. (p. 31)

Rites of passage have served many purposes and have become more than mere ceremonious displays. These rites served to ease the transition from one phase of life into another phase. As Kessler (1999/2000) affirmed, the energy and restlessness of teenagers has often been attributed to hormones, yet these powerful feelings and this restless energy can be channeled into expressions that are not only safe but that also bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood. Kessler (1999/2000) asserts, "Without appropriate support, potentially creative energies may be diverted into depression or violence" (p. 31). We could attribute recent episodes of school violence to the lack of rites of passage that serve to channel the emotions of teenagers into appropriate expressions, and we could attribute teenage depression that leads to suicide to the absence of such rites. Yet, this would be simplifying enormously complex problems that have become endemic to our society.

As graduation looms before them, many high school seniors have applied to various colleges or technical schools; some have applied for an entry-level position at local factories and companies while others will be inducted into one of the branches of the armed forces. Yet, too many seniors have no goals or plans for life after high school. They have become despondent when asked about their plans after graduation. Senior Project alone will certainly not solve this dilemma for teenagers; however, Senior Project has guided teenagers at SEHS toward feelings of fulfillment about their high school experiences, and this has assisted them in finding their voices in society—voices they can use to investigate and search for their place as citizens. "Guided by caring, responsible adults, young people can blossom with character, compassion, and the capacity to make decisions that serve their own growth and the health of the community" (Kessler, 1999/2000, p. 31).

Van Gennep (1960) subdivided the category called rites of passage into rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation.

> Thus, although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated. (p. 11)

Often these subdivisions of the rites of passage have overlapped into one transitional period as can be found in high school graduation. Students have undergone preliminal, liminal, and postliminal rites of passage as they have prepared to leave the status of child and student to enter the status of adult. Some high school seniors have remained students in post-secondary institutions, yet they were no longer treated as children; they were viewed as adults. Many of these adult-students have had the additional responsibility of an employee who earns money to pay the cost of living and the cost of college tuition.

Hence, as seniors have prepared to leave high school, they have dealt with the separation from relationships and from a childhood self.

Additionally, they have undergone the transition from one social world into another social world. Finally, these graduates have been plunged into new relationships and a new status that has required them to be incorporated into the adult world.

Senior Boards assisted students by providing a rite of passage. For probably the first time in her/his life, the student stood not in front of teenage classmates to give an oral report, but stood in front of adults from the community. While the student was still a teenager, s/he was also standing before these judges as an adult, as a member of the larger adult community.

Many of these seniors gave a presentation on a topic of which the adult judges had limited knowledge. Therefore, the senior became the expert in this area. Comments from judges have affirmed this. One judge who viewed a presentation on the history of Salzburg County through the unique recipes for making Salzburger Bread commented, "The presentation was very interesting and taught us something about this area" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 10). Another judge who evaluated a presentation given by Melinda on the rebuilding of an automobile engine stated, "Very well done; she knew her material and convinced the audience of her expertise" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 3). After hearing a presentation on soccer, one judge asserted, "I've wanted to know more about soccer and you certainly helped" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 8). Another judge who listened to a presentation on the New York Yankees reported, "I learned more than I expected to learn about the Yankees" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 3). Millie's Senior Project on leukemia and her oral

presentation resulted in six people becoming bone marrow donors. Lisa raised awareness about cancer research in addition to the $1,000 that she raised for The American Cancer Society's Walkathon. All of these examples emphasized that students involved in Senior Project were involved in something much more than conducting high school research and writing the typical paper. These students were involved in research and a presentation that transported them from the world of childhood and high school to the world of adulthood and maturity.

Comments from judges on Senior Boards have proven to be valuable for the students, educators, and the curricular programs of the school. During the first year of Senior Project, a space was not provided for judges to write comments, yet many judges wrote comments on the back of the rubric or in the margins. The next school year,1998-1999, a space was provided for the judges to share their comments with students and teachers, which resulted in more comments about the presentation and the Senior Project program.

Judges who evaluated Senior Boards during the first two years of Senior Project at SEHS, provided written comments that focused on students' knowledge, research, interests and enthusiasm about and for the various topics. Often these comments would be paired with constructive criticism about the presentation techniques such as, "I would like Sally to make more eye contact during the presentation, yet her knowledge of her subject was well researched and presented" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 1).

As part of experiencing research and preparing for Senior Boards, Sally had designed a day care center based upon her research. She built a model of a day care that

represented even the amount of space required for the number of children that she expected to accommodate. This attention to detail represented Sally's enthusiasm and interest in her topic. As another judge who viewed Sally's presentation stated, "Comments were thought out. She seems to have her career goals worked out in advance" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 1).

For the first year of Senior Project, awards were presented on class night. Each student who participated received a framed certificate. Awards were given to the best project, the best research paper, and the best presentation. Millie received the award for both the best research paper and the best presentation with her research on leukemia. The comments from the judges reflected the high quality of Millie's presentation, which received perfect scores from all the judges and outstanding comments such as, "Excellent! Introduction was very good with a great purpose and good control of facial expressions and hand movement. Knowledge of subject was very good as revealed in that she did not use any note cards to deliver the message" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p.1). In addition to the accolades given Millie by the judges and by the awards on senior night, her presentation was featured in a report produced by a local television station. The news anchor began the broadcast by stating that SEHS is the first school in Georgia to begin the Senior Project and "To the surprise of many, it is already making a difference in the community" (Baker, 1998). Millie stated on this broadcast the reasons why she had chosen her topic:

> My cousin, who is also my best friend, was diagnosed with leukemia when she was about seventeen, about two years ago. It has had a profound effect on my family and my life as well. It has gone as far as causing me to change my job/career from business working with children to counseling children with leukemia. (Baker, 1998)

Millie had chosen her topic because it was something about which she was passionate and that passion showed throughout her entire senior project. When asked what she had learned through this experience, Millie replied, "What I've learned is not only researching a paper, preparing myself for college, but preparing myself for the real world" (Baker, 1998). Her Senior Project experience certainly had a powerful impact on her life and the lives of many others especially the six people who became bone marrow donors and the recipients of that bone marrow.

Not all of the comments about research were so positive. One student who researched AIDS received a low score from the judges on the rubric. The reason for this low score could be seen in comments such as "Tends to present information without research." and "Check spelling on visual aids; don't use 'you know'; know the relation of important terms (hemophiliacs)" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 1). Out of the possible 100 points on the rubric, this student only received 62 points. This emphasizes that the community will not merely give students high scores for attempting a presentation; the student must demonstrate that s/he has conducted thorough research and has learned presentation techniques.

Low scores on the Senior Boards presentation typically reflected poor research and superficial knowledge demonstrated by the student. One student who had chosen pediatrics as her topic received one of the lowest scores for a presentation. Comments reflected that the judges took note of her unprofessional attire (she wore shorts and a T-shirt), her incorrect use of terms, and her inadequate knowledge for a presentation. In her research paper, this student's citations included such cited references as "a pediatrician uses a stethoscope." She had chosen to write a paper that did not demonstrate in-depth

research of her topic. The majority of her paper reflected the knowledge that anyone can obtain by merely experiencing a trip to the doctor's office. I was impressed that judges recognized quality work and did not reward a student unless s/he had demonstrated quality research and substantial knowledge.

Judges recognized hard work and authentic knowledge that was based on research. For instance, Nicolas researched "X-ray Technology," and the judges acknowledged his hard work with the following comments: "Nicolas is obviously very interested in his topic and has done a great deal of research. I am very impressed with his enthusiasm for his research as well as his knowledge of the subject" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 1). Tracy completed her research on "Are Identical Twins Really Alike?" The judges stated,

> Tracy surprised all of the judges with the extent of her knowledge. She provided a lot of information that I was unaware of. Excellent knowledge and presentation skills. She demonstrated research through good visual aids that looked professional even though she was a little nervous. (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2)

Even with the wide variety of topics, judges have been able to see it was the process that students were learning. The knowledge of a particular topic was extra, for it has been the Senior Project process that students were learning. This is a process that students can use in future experiences in both the world of college and the world of work.

Melvin's Senior Project on "The New York Yankees" went over extremely well with the judges. One judge questioned Melvin about a winning streak in the Yankee's history, but he apparently had his facts confused, or he was testing Melvin's resolve. In either case, Melvin corrected this judge by giving the exact years of the winning streak and stating why this judge might have gotten it confused. One judge on Melvin's boards stated, "I can see a tremendous practical value in the program. You're taking what the

kids have learned and bringing it out into the real world" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 3). A judge on another presentation stated similar feelings by writing the following comment on the rubric:

> I think the idea of Senior Projects helps to prepare students for the 'real world.' Presenting in front of people is a crucial element of the business environment. Instituting Senior Project as a requirement would be an excellent step in the right direction for Georgia Public Schools. (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 6)

While I appreciated the enthusiastic support from this judge, I disagreed with the idea of mandating Senior Project from the state level. This would only serve to standardize the Senior Project experience and sink it into the quagmire of the current dilemmas surrounding standardized evaluations.

Even though judges were impressed with this program, they still were not blind to a student's anxieties about presenting in front of adults. During the first year of Senior Project and the Senior Boards, I had returned from the Board of Education to find Ms. Peabody and two other faculty members standing over Tom, who was sitting on the steps in the cafeteria. Tom had a reputation of being a difficult student and had a lengthy rap sheet in the school's discipline files. I immediately approached Tom and was prepared to reprimand him for whatever disturbance he had caused. Ms. Peabody quickly informed me Tom had become so nervous as he stood in front of the judges that he ran from the room in tears. Tom had walked into the room, set up his visual aids, and said "My name is Tom." Then, he ran from the room with tears streaming down his face. After talking to Tom, he agreed to give his presentation another attempt. This time he went back into the room, said, "My name is Tom, and my topic is basketball. Do you have any questions?" A few questions were asked and Tom finished his presentation early, but he did finish it.

The only comment on his rubric was "Good Job!" He received a score of 72 out a possible 100. Over the summer, Tom wrote a thank-you letter to a judge who had given him some words of encouragement after the presentation. I am still amazed that Tom would have taken the time to write a thank-you letter. This was a major learning experience for him and for all of us who were involved with Senior Boards.

Often judges realized the socially relevant nature of students' Senior Project research, and they commented about how this research could be used to benefit others. A presentation on "Chemotherapy" received this remark from a judge: "Notebooks are wonderful and could be kept in a doctor's office for patients undergoing chemotherapy" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2).

Michelle researched "Rohypnol: The Date Rape Drug" and amazed the judges with her poise, sincerity, and knowledge about a socially relevant subject. One of the judges even wrote on the rubric, "Her subject needs wide distribution" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 5). Michelle had been extremely nervous about giving a public presentation, and since the judges on her panel were all male, she was even more anxious. She was given some words of encouragement, and she obviously did an excellent job presenting information on such a socially relevant topic.

Another topic delved into the dark world of "Cults." Buddy gave a very good presentation on this subject as evident by the score and the judges' comments. Buddy had wanted to examine the hypnotic influence that cult leaders have over their followers. From the judges' remarks, he seemed to have accomplished this superbly. As one judge stated, "Buddy's presentation communicated hope in an otherwise alarming topic" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2).

Many of the topics for Senior Project and the presentations for Senior Boards do not fit into the categories of social activism, career aspirations, or college preparation. Some students shine during Senior Boards because of their theatrical flair. This individual style, this panache shines forth through dramatic performances before the judges. Alice stood outside of the presentation room dressed in a black wig and the Egyptian costume of a princess. Her topic was "Pyramids," and she presented in costume with a model of a pyramid that had a cut-away section allowing the judges to view the chambers within this tomb built for Egyptian royalty. Barri performed a modern country song as a finale to her presentation on "Country Music." One judge commented that she had a "very creative format!" Jennifer's topic was "Choreography" and she presented videotape of a dance routine that she had choreographed and performed. One judge made the astute observation, "Should have done a live dance for the audience" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 6).

Randi staged a fashion show, in which three students served as models while she moderated. Cindy performed a modern dance for the judges as part of her presentation on "Modern Dance." Jennifer assisted Cindy with the choreography of this dance and even stood in the back of the room during the presentation and allowed Cindy to shadow her movements for the dance. This was noticed by the judges and was reflected in her low score as well as in the comment, "Needed to practice dance more" (Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 5). Ginny researched Alcatraz and dressed as a prisoner for Senior Boards. She even had the school resource officer escort her into the presentation room. Her props included a cot and a fake head. Once the head was placed on the cot with a blanket pulled

around it, the appearance of a sleeping prisoner was achieved. She had a poster that glittered the name Alcatraz as if searchlights had been shown upon it.

Barbara had researched the flute and had planned on performing a solo on this instrument, but a severe dog bite to her hand prevented such a performance. We even scheduled her presentation for the last day of Senior Boards, but she was unable to perform. The judges comments still reflected her enthusiasm. "Very interesting—enjoyable" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2). Jessie researched "Watercolor Painting" and even had the judges attempt to paint using watercolors after he had given them a lesson on painting clouds. This led a judge to comment, "The displays were creative especially bringing the audience into the presentation" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 4). Tammi showed her interest in theatrics by researching one act plays. Her presentation for Senior Boards consisted of staging a one-act play that she had written and directed. Three other students served as actors in Tammi's play. The judges' comments about Tammi's performance revealed the intricate weaving of theatrics with the components of a speech. One judge commented that Tammi's presentation revealed a "Good delivery" that she was "well versed on the subject" and that she "answered questions with confidence" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 4). Another judge was impressed with the "Creative use of space for a presentation" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 4). A judge also commented that the presentation utilized a "Wonderful use of visuals and demonstration of process" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 4). A final judge's comment revealed pleasure with the presentation but concern for details in the entire performance. "I enjoyed it! But there

were spelling errors in the program for the play" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 4).

Al gave one very unusual presentation. He had researched "Punk Rock Music," and his presentation included performing this type of music for the judges. One judge commented, "The student was confident that his presentation was a good one" (Senior Project, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 8). This comment sounded as if the judge may not have appreciated the style of music that Al had chosen to perform. Another musical performance was presented by Peter. He had researched the rudiments of percussion focusing on drum music from the 1880s. For Senior Boards, Peter came dressed in a Confederate uniform and played a Civil War era drum solo. Ervin, a member of the SEHS Chorale, researched choral music. For his experiential component of Senior Project, he taught the SEHS Chorale a piece of music and directed them in a performance for Senior Boards.

These students demonstrated talents in performances that went beyond their original research. Many other students dressed in costume to fit their presentations, such as Karl who dressed in a track-and-field outfit to present "Discus: An Olympic Event." Margaret dressed in camouflage for her presentation on "Game Laws for Children under Eighteen." Charlotte researched "The Girls' Professional Baseball League" and came dressed in a uniform that she had replicated from pictures of that era. She even found patches on the Internet and included them on her uniform. As she began her presentation, she said, "My name is Charlotte, but today, I am Dotty a member of The Girls' Professional Baseball League." Hence, Charlotte combined both costume and drama in her presentation. This was no surprise to Ms. Peabody who had received Charlotte's thirty-page research paper

even though only 10 to 12 pages were required. Charlotte stated, "I just kept finding more and more information on my topic that I felt was necessary for my paper" (Fieldnotes, p. 62).

Other students dressed in costumes or used props to make their presentations more dramatic for the judges. For example, Patricia researched wedding cakes used in weddings by different cultures around the world. For her experience, she worked at a bakery learning cake decorating, and for Senior Boards, she brought in an elaborate wedding cake. Patricia's presentation for Senior Boards was aesthetically pleasing for the judges as they entered the presentation room and saw this elegant wedding cake sitting on the table in the front of the room. At the conclusion of her presentation, Patricia cut the wedding cake, and the judges' palates were pleased with the results of her experiential project. Comments from the judges revealed surprise in the topic selection and in the knowledge that Patricia had gained from her experiences. "This was a very interesting topic to choose by a senior. Patricia seemed to thoroughly enjoy the project and was enthusiastic about all that she has learned" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2). Another judge commented on both the presentation and the topic selection stating that Patricia "Talked a little fast," and that even though her project was "Not the normal topic—very interesting however" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2). One final judge was impressed with Patricia's knowledge and poise in interacting with the judges by stating that Patricia was "Very good with answering questions" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2).

Some of the students put more into the drama of the presentations than others did, but there seemed to be an awareness that a presentation needs more than a warm body

spouting information. This awareness needs to be shared with educators who attempt to present lessons to students without realizing that theatrics play an enormous role in how well an audience receives what is being presented.

Senior Project has become a learning experience for educators at SEHS, as well as for the students. Mentors have learned to guide students. Students have learned how to adapt their projects to the schedules and uncertainties of working with various other people. English teachers have learned to incorporate authentic life skills into the curriculum. And, administrators have learned to trust students to direct their own educational experiences in avenues that have led off campus and into the community.

I have been convinced that Senior Project is an important ingredient in an educational mix that adds flavor to the experiences of high school students as they search for answers and learn how to construct knowledge for themselves. During the first year that Senior Project was implemented at SEHS, we also began the process of obtaining accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Since our school had just been constructed for the 1996-1997 school year, we had not been through a SACS accreditation process to develop a school improvement plan. As this process unfolded, I realized that Senior Project provided opportunities for our school to achieve the goals set forth in our school improvement plan. Ms. Peabody, who had the responsibility of chairing our SACS Steering Committee added to her responsibilities of implementing Senior Project, also saw the enormous possibilities for Senior Project to play a role in our school improvement plan. Consequently, by placing Senior Project as an integral part of our school improvement plan, we ensured that Senior Project became

essential in the process of planning the curriculum and improving our school. For instance, the first goal of the school improvement plan for SEHS states,

> **Desired Results for Student Learning**: 1) Students utilize, evaluate, and refine creative strategies to solve diverse problems. 2) Students analyze, judge, and synthesize new information from a variety of formats.
> **Target Areas**: Collaborative opportunities and staff development are needed to enhance interdisciplinary relationships and articulation among grade levels and departments.
> **Goal Statement**: Interdisciplinary opportunities will be provided in the areas of critical thinking and problem solving. (Salzburg Estates High School: School Improvement Plan 1998-1999, p. 4)

While devising a school improvement plan, SEHS decided to place Senior Project under a broad umbrella initiative referred to as Student Initiative Performance (SIP). SIP became the umbrella under which many of the school's existing programs and developing programs could be organized and maintained.

The first intervention under Goal 1 of the SEHS School Improvement Plan states, "Expand existing Student Initiative Performance program (SIP) to foster and develop critical thinking and problem solving skills" (Salzburg Estates High School: School Improvement Plan 1998-1999, p. 4). Estimated resources are cited as "Media Center, faculty, staff, administrators, community members, SERVE" (Salzburg Estates High School: School Improvement Plan 1998-1999, p. 4). Persons responsible are identified as "SIP Coordinators" (Salzburg Estates High School: School Improvement Plan 1998-1999, p. 4). Finally, the means of evaluation are described as, "SIP advisory committee, surveys, interviews, performance data from Senior Boards" (Salzburg Estates High School: School Improvement Plan 1998-1999, p. 4). Therefore, the process found within the Senior Project program provided a vehicle for school improvement as well as a means by which to ensure a continued commitment to Senior Project.

SERVE invited Ms. Peabody and me to be presenters at the Senior Project Institute that was held at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina, during the summer of 1998. We presented on "Senior Project and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Accreditation Process." We shared the experiences that we had undergone at SEHS in achieving our school improvement goals through Senior Project, and also how we made Senior Project part of our school improvement plan.

At the 1998 SERVE fall Forum, Ms. Peabody and I were asked to participate in a session dealing with alternative forms of assessment and specifically with Senior Project. At this meeting, I began to see the widespread interest in Senior Project. During a Senior Project Coordinator's networking meeting in Orlando, Florida, I began to focus a realization that many schools throughout the Southeast were either involved with Senior Project or were seriously investigating its potential for their schools.

At the 1999, American Educational Research Association's Annual Convention in Montreal, Canada, I presented the Senior Project Initiative as part of a session on Contributions to School Performance Research. My presentation was "Senior Project: Performance-Based School Improvement Plan." Shortly after this conference, Dr. Holden, principal at SEHS, received a telephone call from a representative at The League of Professional Schools. They were interested in Senior Project and wanted to provide a presentation on Senior Project at their next annual conference. At this conference in Savannah, Georgia, Ms. Tinker, Ms. Rinard, and a student, Marnie, assisted me in the presentation. This provided an excellent opportunity for those in the audience to obtain a multiple perspective concerning Senior Project, and it allowed two teachers and a student to obtain an aura of professionalism concerning their work with Senior Project.

Prior to The League of Professional Schools' conference, SERVE held its 1999 Senior Project Institute in Asheville, North Carolina, where my wife, Belinda Winters, and I presented on Cultivating Administrative Support for Senior Project. Ms. Peabody also presented at the Serve 1999 Senior Project Institute.

My wife had been looking into ways in which the principles of Senior Project could affect elementary school children—specifically her first grade students. She quickly identified the Social Science Fair as a place to begin. She asked a student in the fifth grade to present her research and project on "Companion Dogs" to my wife's first graders. This presentation was a huge success for the students. This certainly led to the mentorship project between some of the seniors at SEHS and my wife's first grade class at Salzburg Estates Elementary School (SEE). This endeavor has benefited the elementary students and the seniors who are working on Senior Projects.

SERVE again asked me to participate in their fall Forum for 1999. My participation was to be in a session on Effective High Schools. Research presented on effective high schools revealed that programs such as Senior Project were common to the most effective high schools. Therefore, Senior Project was highlighted in this session.

Immediately following this session on Effective High Schools, a principal of a comprehensive high school/middle school approached me about presenting to her school the concepts and implementations of Senior Project. I had Ms. Peabody join me for this presentation. We were part of sessions provided to all employees at their countywide meeting. This provided Ms. Peabody and me with an opportunity to share what we had experienced and learned with teachers at all grade levels from elementary school through

high school as well as with teachers of varying ability groups from college bound students to students in special educational settings.

Experiences such as these accentuate the fact that Senior Project is not a program that operates in isolation from other educational experiences. Students involved with Senior Project recognized that learning is a process of interconnected experiences that are so intricate in nature they are dependent upon one another in forming knowledge, understanding, and what we have termed education. This is more than an interdisciplinary lesson or a co-curricular program; this is a curricular approach that acknowledges the tapestry of educational experiences and also draws from the strengths found in the threads that are woven through it. What students have learned from previous educational experiences both in the process of schooling and in the process of living is recycled again and again as they are engaged in fresh, challenging experiences that demand a stretching of prior knowledge into new realms, new ways of understanding, and new ways of forming knowledge. This is not only an objective of Senior Project, for a critical pedagogy embraces any objective that propels learning from the boundaries of schooling into the experiences of society, culture, and life.

As educators, our responsibility has become an effort to adopt a pedagogy that will produce a praxis from which students will not cry out as Vladimir did in Waiting for Godot, "What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we know the answer. Yes in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting" (Beckett, 1982/1954, pp. 51-52). Whether students are waiting for Godot or for graduation is not what is important. The critical importance lies in how students are caught up in a curriculum that they can experience rather than in enduring while waiting

and waiting and waiting until we say you have waited long enough; now, you can move on, now you can graduate.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Analysis for this study included a thematic analysis of the data collected from students, from judges for Senior Boards, from educators at SEHS, and from my reflections concerning my participation with Senior Project. Themes threaded through the data from each of these sources that included perceptions from students, teachers, a school administrator, and community volunteers were analyzed and similarities between these themes were noted.

In addition, I asked Ms. Peabody, an English teacher at SEHS who implemented Senior Project from 1996 through 2000, to read my study. Furthermore, I asked Paula Egelson, a senior researcher with SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), to read the analysis of my data. By considering the comments of these two educators who have a working knowledge of Senior Project as it is implemented at SEHS and in schools throughout the southeast, I felt that I was adding credibility to my study. Yet, this is not to be confused with the concept of validity that is a positivist concept used in quantitative research. I agree with Denzin and Lincoln (1998) who state, "To a critical researcher, validity means much more than the traditional definitions of internal and external validity usually associated with the concept" (p. 287). There is much more to critical research than the quantifying of the research; the quality of the research and the manner in which it allows various groups to construct knowledge and even facts is crucial to critical research. Therefore, I do not adhere to positivist notions of research that force knowledge

into a "methodology madness". While explicating on the "methodology madness" that has gripped our schools and the research concerning schooling, Giroux (1997) states, "Knowledge, then becomes not only countable and measurable, it also becomes impersonal...Another important point concerning knowledge in this view is that it takes on the appearance of being context free" (21). Hence, I agree with Denzin and Lincoln's (1998) statement, "Some analysts argue that validity may be an inappropriate term in a critical research context, as it simply reflects a concern for acceptance within a positivist concept of research rigor" (p. 287). I prefer the concept of trustworthiness for as Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state, "It is helpful because it signifies a different set of assumptions about research purposes than does validity" (p. 287). Expounding on this concept of trustworthiness, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) discuss how trustworthiness embraces the credibility of the constituted realities that are divulged by the critical researcher. To this end, I asked Ms. Peabody and Paula Egelson to read this research in an effort to gain their insight into the plausibility of the perceptions and constituted realities as put forth by my research. The opinions and comments they made from their insights were utilized as I finalized this analysis of the data.

Interviews with Students

To begin with, I analyzed the data gathered from students. This included a thematic analysis of the interviews I conducted with six students who were involved with Senior Project and an analysis of the topics chosen by all students involved in Senior Project along with the experiential endeavors of these students to expand their traditional research.

A thematic analysis of the interviews with six randomly chosen students revealed three themes that were woven through these interviews. Interviews with students were conducted during the 1999-2000 school year. From these interviews, I identified the following themes: Senior Project was designed to prepare students for future endeavors, allowed students to incorporate personal interest into their studies, and provided students with freedom to pursue those personal interests. These three themes reoccurred several times within these interviews. The most prevalent theme that emerged from the student interviews dealt with the purpose of Senior Project.

Students' Perceptions of the Purpose of Senior Project

In regard to the purpose of Senior Project, each student interviewed revealed a perception that Senior Project was providing preparation for post-high school experiences. Preparation for college was the most frequently mentioned purpose of Senior Project, but it was not the only purpose perceived by these students. According to these students, Senior Project had the purpose of preparing them for college, for occupations, for achievements in life, and for instructing them in the process of conducting an in-depth study.

Matt, a student who was described as average by his teachers, stated that the purpose of Senior Project was to prepare students for college. When asked how Senior Project prepares students for college, his response was similar to those of other students. He said that Senior Project helped him to learn how to write papers and do the type of research that he would have to do in college. Kathy, a high achieving student who was a member of both the Beta Club and the National Honor Society, echoed a similar perception concerning the purpose of Senior Project. She stated, "The purpose of Senior Project is to

prepare the student for papers they [sic] will write in college and the college circumstances" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 13). According to Kathy, college circumstances included conducting an independent study of a topic and recording the results of that study in a formal research paper that could be defended before college professors.

James, a talented athlete who was a starting player on the varsity football, basketball, and baseball teams, remained consistent with the perceptions of other students when he stated that Senior Project provided him with practice in writing reports and in getting ready for college. Brad, a student who had great dramatic talent and who had applied for an apprenticeship at a local aircraft manufacturer, stated that the reason he wanted to be involved with Senior Project was to learn how to write a research paper, narrow a topic, and to be prepared to write college papers. His perception seemed to grasp the concept that writing a research paper was a process, which included more than placing words on paper. Janis, a student who exerted her individuality by refusing to follow the crowd and who had changed her diploma track from college preparatory to vocational preparatory, responded with a similar insight into the research process students were learning. She stated that Senior Project showed colleges and schools that students actually had learned "how to speak English, how to write it, and how to put research together that could be used later on in college" (Student Interviews, 2000, p. 23). From responses such as these, students appeared to be grasping the idea that research is a process with steps, which included more than writing. Janis was not the only student who seemed to feel Senior Project showed others how competent students were in the research process.

Chris, a student who played varsity baseball and exhibited pride in his rural southern heritage, offered another perception concerning the purpose of Senior Project. He stated, "I believe it [Senior Project] is to give us an idea of what we want to achieve later on in life" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 8). When asked what he meant by what students want to achieve later on in life, Chris responded, "for the occupation that we want to shoot for" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 8). This revealed that at least some students viewed Senior Project as a process that allowed them to focus on career aspirations as well as academic preparation for college. In addition, Chris viewed Senior Project as a means by which the community can see that students are better prepared for post-secondary experiences. He stated, "Senior Project shows the community that we're, well, I guess informed, but that isn't the word I'm looking for (pause) organized and that we will be better prepared for college than other students who are not doing Senior Project" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 9). Again, this response revealed that there is a process involved in research, and according to Chris, that process includes organization.

The students I interviewed seemed to view Senior Project as a means through which they were being prepared for life after high school. This preparation centered on academic and vocational preparation but also included social preparation in becoming adults. I identified this theme not only through the interviews that I held with students but also through an examination of the topics that students chose for their research. These topics reflected how students were being prepared for life as adults as well as a representation of what interested students as they prepared to leave the world of high school students.

Students' Perceptions Reveal the Value of Personal Interest

Additionally, the students I interviewed revealed that Senior Project was important to them because it allowed them to incorporate personal interest into what they were learning in school. Hence, personal interest became the second theme that emerged from interviews with students. This was reflected when these students said that they liked Senior Project because it was enjoyable, fun, interesting, encouraging, and that it was not boring because it allowed them to focus on what they wanted to do, which according to at least one student made him happy. When I heard these responses, I began to see the positive nature of Senior Project, but I was also saddened to realize that these are not the typical feelings students have about what they are required to accomplish in school.

Some students may find school assignments boring and detached from what they are interested in learning. Brad honestly stated, "The paper wasn't the funnest [sic] thing, but I'm looking forward to getting up in front of a group of people and performing" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 4). Brad had been involved with drama and enjoyed dramatic performances. Thus, it was no surprise to me that he enthusiastically anticipated the Senior Boards presentation. He stated that he had put a lot more time into Senior Project than he had in most of his other school assignments. The reason for this became evident when Brad stated, "I actually enjoyed my Senior Project more than my other assignments because I got interested in what I was doing. But it's taken a lot more time and a lot more effort" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 4). Brad did not mind the extra time and effort that he had to put into Senior Project because he found it interesting which motivated him to put forth the extra effort.

When I asked Kathy about her feelings concerning Senior Project, she responded, "I think it's very beneficial; I'm not going to say I liked the whole writing and typing of the

paper, but I did learn from it. I didn't enjoy it, but I learned from it" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 13). Kathy did not express fondness for writing the research paper, but she admitted that she learned from it. She also said that everyone talks about the dreaded Senior Project because too many students wait until the last minute to type their papers. Kathy said that she learned more from Senior Project than just how to write research papers. For her, one of the most important discoveries was that "you come out knowing so much more about the topic. I mean I've always been interested in photography [her chosen topic], and I've thought about majoring in photography in college" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 14). But, Kathy acknowledged that she no longer wanted to major in photography because of what she had learned through her research. She learned that photography was not the career field for her. Thus, her interest in photography had become more focused on taking pictures as a hobby rather than as an occupation. Therefore, the most crucial learning for Kathy concerned what she had learned about photography as a college major and a potential career.

Personal choice was important to these students as evident in Janis's words. "I have loved the idea that we got to choose our own Senior Project. The only trouble I had was in making up my mind" (Student Interviews, 2000, p.25). James also expressed strong feelings about being allowed to choose a topic in which he was interested. "If you're doing something that's boring, that's going to make it even harder. You're not going to want to do it, so if you're doing something you can pick and that's fun then it'll be a little easier to do" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 21). James expressed that he was happy with his research because he was allowed to choose a topic in which he was highly interested.

He had trouble narrowing the topic down as did Janis, but once he did, he found he was happy with his selection and his work.

Chris seemed to summarize the enthusiasm for personal topics in his advice to seniors who would be engaged in Senior Project next year. "Choose a topic that you're interested in, that you'll enjoy doing" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 9). He considered this to be the best advice to future seniors. Yet, Chris admitted that even though he was interested in his topic and really wanted to research it, he found out he did not want to pursue forestry [his topic] as a career. He said that he might look into physical education instead. As with Kathy, Chris found his research interesting, but he had also discovered that he did not want to focus on his topic in college or as a career.

Consequently, these students were motivated by their high level of interest in their research topic and in their experience based on that research, which made them put forth more effort than they had in other assignments. At least two of these students found that even though they were interested in their topic, they did not want to base a career upon that interest.

Similarly, the daughter of a member on the Salzburg County's Board of Education discovered some important insight into her personal interests concerning a college major and a career choice. This delighted her parents who had seen their daughter struggle with the choice for a research topic and thereby determine her direction of study for college. Her mother shared this with me while standing in the morning heat of a South Georgia Saturday on graduation day. As I listened, I became immersed in a conversation with these two parents about their daughter, graduation, and Senior Project. In this conversation, these parents shared with me that their daughter had originally chosen

sports medicine as a topic for her research, but she changed her topic once she began her research. She subsequently changed her topic to the professional girls' baseball league and focused on the social implications for women through this historic organization. Her mother and she had replicated a uniform worn by women in the girls' professional baseball league. Thus, she began to focus her career aspirations on the area of either clothing design or interior decorating. This student also researched colleges that had majors in these areas and set her goal on attending Georgia State University because of its programs in design. Her mother stated that one of the best outcomes of Senior Project was that students were allowed to examine potential careers or college majors and either personally affirm them or reject them.

Hence, Senior Project allowed students to examine personal interests through in-depth research that often revealed to the individual student an understanding that had evaded their initial preoccupation with that area of interest. One of the positive elements of Senior Project uncovered the realities of adult life that centered on a romantic view. This example was true of Chris's research into timber management. Chris was interested in timer management because his grandfather had spent his life working with timber and living in the forests of southern Georgia. Upon a closer examination, Chris found that timber management was not the area in which he wanted to work. The same was true of Kathy's fascination with photography. She decided that photography was an exciting hobby, but, for her, it would not be a rewarding career. These are just two examples of how research into an area of interest led to a realization that the student was not interested enough to base a career in that area. Yet, by allowing students the freedom to investigate

personal interests, the students were able to conceptualize the nuances of their interests through daily experiences.

Students' Perceptions Concerning the Value of Freedom

The third theme that was woven through these student interviews focused on the concept of freedom. While all students interviewed acknowledged that they had been given a great deal of freedom in choosing a topic and designing their own research around that topic, they were divided on how much freedom high school students should be given in Senior Project. Brad felt that the paper and the project would decrease in quality if there were restrictions placed upon students' freedom to choose any topic and design their own experiential project. On the other hand, Chris felt that topics should be approved, and that there should be limits set on what students can research, and what they can say in their presentation.

Likewise, Kathy wanted more guidance in choosing a topic and designing a research project. She felt overwhelmed by the freedom to choose any topic that she wanted. James echoed similar feelings when he said, "I need all the guidance I can get" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 19). To the contrary, Janis felt that students should not be limited or strictly guided in decisions about Senior Project. She stated, "I really don't think we should be limited considering that this is something that we do for ourselves even though it is an assignment for school" (Student Interviews, 2000, p. 27). Janis felt that the freedom to even choose controversial topics should be left to the discretion of the students while Chris and Kathy felt that some topics would not be appropriate for high school students to study.

When it came to freedom to choose a topic and design a research project, Brad and Janis saw freedom as an important element in Senior Project. They believed that this freedom provided quality within the entire project regardless of the nature of the topic. Chris, James, Matt, and Kathy stated that some topics could be too controversial for high school students to study. Yet, Kathy felt that her classmates would not choose such topics. These students reflected an appreciation for the freedoms given through Senior Project, yet they were divided on how much freedom should be given to teenagers. Janis did acknowledge that some presentations could be so controversial as to hurt a student's grade. She said that this should be considered when approving certain aspects of a project, such as the presentation. Therefore, she did feel that some form of guidance should be exercised in advising students especially for presentations to Senior Boards, so students did not receive a lower grade as a result of presenting a topic that was too controversial. Hence, Janis's concerns focused more on how a controversial topic would effect a student's grade than on whether or not a topic is appropriate for high school students to study. This focus on grades certainly stems from a system of schooling that has placed substantial emphasis on quantifying educational experiences with a statistical representation. I wonder how many decisions made by students concerning their educational experiences are influenced by a preoccupation with grades rather than a motivation for forming and acquiring knowledge.

For the experiential component of Senior Project, students expanded their traditional research with further experiences that went beyond the writing of a research paper. Experiences chosen by students were analyzed to inquire into the types of experiences chosen. Seven categories of experiences were identified. These categories were labeled as

follows: fine arts performance, interactive participation, practical experience, project model, research-based experience, shadowing experience, and social activism. These categories were identified during analysis of the data and were not presented to students as categories from which they were to choose. The fine arts performance contained practicing and preparing for a performance involving a form of art that was part of the student's formal presentation. Interactive participation required that the student involve the judges on Senior Boards in some active manner with the presentation. Some students engaged in practical experiences that required them to become engaged in a hands-on activity related to their research. The project model consisted of an actual model constructed by students to represent the understanding they had gained from their research. Research-based experience referred to students extending their initial research with more traditional research on the topic, which they gained from further inquiry through books. A shadowing experience required that students spend time with an expert in the area they had chosen for their research topic. Finally, some students were involved with social activism that gave back to the community through volunteer service in the area of their research. In addition, there were eight combinations of these categories.

The vast majority of students chose to complete a research-based experience over the other experiences that were available. This seemed unusual given that some students claim to want more hands-on activities and fewer activities centered on books. Willis (1980) found these sentiments among the lads in Hammertown who preferred active learning or hands-on learning rather the processes of mental activity. This mindset resulted in the view among the lads of Hammertown that "theory is only useful insofar as it really does help to do things" (p. 57). McLaren (1986/1999) seemed to echo similar

sentiments in his descriptions of the "streetcorner state" and the "student state". In the "streetcorner state," students tended to be physical and demonstrate unfettered exuberance. Yet at SEHS, almost one-half of the students involved with Senior Project chose to complete an experience that was based on conducting more traditional research. Was this because these students perceived that traditional research was more acceptable, or was it because it was more accessible to conduct further research than to conduct a hands-on type experience? When Paula Egelson, a senior researcher with SERVE, read this analysis, she commented concerning students' choices for research-based experiences, "Could one reason be that the research-based experience is an easier concept to grasp?"

Overwhelmingly, students chose experiences for their senior projects that involved more library-based research rather than choosing hands-on experiences to extend their original inquiries. Some of the students chose an experience that was a combination of these categories. These combinations were unique to each year without being repeated the next year. Yet, most of these combinations included some form of research-based experiences, which continued to reflect a choice for that category by these students.

Once a demographic analysis of the Salzburg Estates community was made along with an examination of the students involved with Senior Project, I realized that the majority of families within this community expected their children to attend college, and the majority of seniors at SEHS were enrolled in college preparatory English classes. Less than one-third of seniors at SEHS were enrolled in either vocational English classes such as applied communication classes or other non-college preparatory English classes.

This revealed that the majority of students at SEHS enrolled in classes designed to prepare them for college.

From the projects of students in 1998, 1999, and 2000, the least chosen experiential category was social activism. Only a few students chose to be engaged in some form of experience that included volunteering in community service. One of these students raised over $1,000 for the American Cancer Society during its annual walkathon; her topic was breast cancer. Another student participated in a bone marrow drive, which was held in Charleston, South Carolina. She also donated her platelets at a local hospital. Her topic was leukemia. Another student who chose art therapy as her topic volunteered as a mentor to a group of first grade students at a nearby elementary school. One other student chose to join a volunteer fire department as part of his research and experience in the area of pyrotechnics.

Interestingly, three of the students who chose an experience that included social activism were female and their topics were medical in nature. From a critical theory perspective, I questioned what this has to say about the climate of the student body at SEHS. I wondered if the small number of students interested in social activism reflected apathy toward their community, or did it reflect a greater sense of security in school endeavors that are less socially active and based more on traditional research? Furthermore, since the majority of students choosing social activism were female, did this reveal a gender specific interest in social activism? I have accepted that these questions need to be considered when analyzing the climate of a school and when suggesting experiential projects to students in the future. Critical theory addresses such concerns, yet

the scope of my research focuses more theories espoused by neo-progressivists than by critical theorists.

Some students chose areas of social concern, but they furthered their traditional research with research-based experiences that were a continuation of traditional research. A few of these topics included school violence, the influence of cults, issues surrounding women in society, date rape, dyslexia in school age children, environmental issues, and safety concerns such as those surrounding the aircraft industry. These choices reflected an interest in social issues, but these students chose to further their knowledge of these issues with more in-depth traditional research rather than with social activism that included volunteering within the community. A few of the judges who heard these students' presentations commented that these presentations and information needed to be shared with young people in our community.

When Janis was asked if Senior Project should require students to be involved with some form of community service in the way that some schools mandate community service, she replied,

> You know, I think that should actually be suggested next year to seniors. I really think you should address that because right now, if I had known that; I probably would have done that. When you really think about it, that looks good on college applications. You could put that on a college application beside from the fact that I actually did a senior project, I did it so well, and I made this grade on it. I also helped the community by doing it. I think that a college would be very impressed by that. I think that should be addressed—maybe not mandated, but definitely brought up. (Student Interviews, 2000, p. 29)

According to Janis, students should be encouraged to make community service a part of their senior projects.

Yet, what was the motive behind Janis's desire to see community service as part of Senior Project? From her comments, Janis appears to view community service as

possibly having a favorable influence on college admissions officers. Her statement, "...I also helped the community..." appeared to be more self-serving than social activism. This could be the difference between a student who chooses a topic because s/he feels passionate about that issue and then turns that passion into activism or volunteerism, and a student who chooses community service because it would look good on a college application. Of course, some may argue that it does not matter why a student gets involved in community service, for by being involved in the community is a learning experience that could foster passion for a life that includes volunteerism. I assert that we as educators need to instill passion for social issues in our students so that volunteerism or activism is a result of their passion rather than a mandated curricular objective.

Judges' Comments

A second source of data for my study consisted of written comments made by judges who evaluated the oral presentations of students. The final component of the Senior Project process involved an oral presentation before judges who were comprised of members from the community and from the school. These oral presentations are referred to as Senior Boards. Senior Boards were held one to two weeks prior to the last week of school for seniors. Judges on Senior Boards completed a scoring rubric for each presentation. Each student received a composite score on her/his presentation that was an average of the judges' scores. In addition, space on the rubric for comments was made available for the judges, and the judges were encouraged to write their comments about the individual presentation and about the Senior Project program. These comments were transcribed and a thematic analysis was conducted.

For the 2000 Senior Boards, approximately 78 people from the community and the school volunteered their time as judges. This allowed the community to see actual demonstrations of what students had learned and were capable of performing. As a small token of our appreciation, each judge received a framed certificate acknowledging her/his participation as a judge on Senior Boards. These certificates have been seen hanging on the walls of local businesses, which has generated a positive atmosphere around the Senior Project program.

Some judges who volunteered for Senior Boards have expressed concern about how to evaluate presentations in comparison to other presentations. This was a concern voiced by one of the board of education members who felt he was not prepared to judge presentations. The concept that any evaluation of a student must include a comparison of each student to his/her classmates seems to be engrained in the perception some people have about evaluating student performance. This concept has been used for most standardized evaluations, but Senior Project is a performance-based assessment of students. Therefore, students are evaluated on how well each student performs according to standards set by educators and by students. This has required judges to envision the process in which students are engaged.

Judges on Senior Boards evaluated how well students conducted independent research, incorporated that research in an experiential project, and presented that research/experience. These evaluations included rubrics designed by educators in the school and by standards individual students set as they designed their own unique research.

The first year SEHS implemented Senior Project, I had a difficult time dealing with how to assess students whose research was so diverse. I questioned how we could evaluate a student who researched combustible engines and a student who researched leukemia. When I voiced my concerns to a senior researcher from the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), she helped me understand that Senior Project is a process, and it is the process that we were evaluating rather than the topic. This has become a concept that I have repeatedly reverberated to students, teachers, parents, and community members who have questions about the assessments we are doing through Senior Project. Prior to judging presentations, judges receive an overview of the Senior Project program along with a detailed explanation of the rubric used. They are told to evaluate each student on the amount of effort placed into the individual project and the amount of expertise the student demonstrates on the particular topic.

For Senior Boards held in May 2000, 78 community members volunteered to participate as judges, and 45 of these judges came from outside of the school with the remainder being comprised of faculty/staff within the school. The judges from outside of SEHS represented various interests, but each expressed a specific interest in the educational experiences of high school students. Judges from outside of the school included: 16 professors from local universities, three executives from local businesses, three newspaper journalists, three television journalists, two nurses from a local hospital, two staff members from the State Department of Education, a Georgia state senator, a representative to the State House of Representatives, a representative from a U.S. Senator's office, three retired individuals, a local board of education member, the community relations officer from our board of education, our Superintendent of Schools,

and administrators from other schools. In addition, a representative from the local chapter of the American Red Cross, the county 4-H coordinator, our county sheriff, and two parents of students who were not seniors volunteered time to serve as judges.

From this pool of judges, I saw how important politically, economically, and socially our schools are to the community. By having such a diverse group of judges, Senior Project at SEHS embodied the potential to bring the community into the school as participants in the educational endeavors of students. This gave the community an opportunity to interact positively with students and educators rather than having the community detached from the school, passively reading about test scores, violence, and drugs within schools statewide and nationwide.

Senior Boards 2000 began on Tuesday, May 4, and continued through Thursday, May 11. Judges volunteered to serve on Senior Boards for an hour or two, half a day, or a full day. Some judges came back and served for more than one day. For instance, one university professor actually came every day of the six days and served as a judge. A counselor from another university came one day to judge and then returned another day saying he liked the process so much, he wanted to come back again. Other judges who came for more than one day included several professors, business executives, retired professionals, as well as a Georgia state senator.

Prior to serving on Senior Boards, each judge was given a scoring rubric for the presentations. These rubrics were explained to the judges prior to the presentations, which included an explanation that each student was to be evaluated on her/his own presentation and not on a comparison with other presentations. Judges were also asked to write comments about the presentations and the Senior Project program on the rubrics.

The judges were told that these comments would give feedback to the students and to the school as plans were made to implement next year's Senior Project program.

Senior Boards began early on May 4, as I set up the judges' hospitality room while my secretary, Ms. Devons and Ms. Peabody, one of the English teachers who implemented Senior Project in the 1999-2000 school year, set up the judges' sign-in table. Even though the first presentation began each morning at 9:30, some judges arrived around 8:40. As the judges arrived, they walked into the school to be greeted by two student ambassadors who were stationed at the judges' check-in table. Five students, who were not involved with Senior Project, rotated duties as student ambassadors to greet judges, to escort them to the hospitality room, to the presentation rooms, to lunch, and even on a tour of the school. Once a judge checked-in, s/he was given a nametag, asked if s/he would be staying to eat lunch with us, and then escorted to the hospitality room.

The hospitality room was supplied with snacks for the judges and information about the school, as well as about Senior Project. In this room, a Power Point presentation displaying information about our Senior Project program and pictures of students as they were involved in the Senior Project process played repeatedly. In addition, judges could skim through information about SERVE, Senior Project, and the 1999-2000 SEHS Yearbook. Beginning on May 5, I added a notebook that contained pictures of the students presenting from the previous day's Senior Boards. Each day I added new pictures from the previous day's presentations. In addition, the visual aids used by students in their presentations were also displayed in the school's media center.

As judges entered the hospitality room, they were met with the smell of coffee, fruit, sweets, and other snacks as the music from the Power Point presentation played in the

background. This setting allowed the judges an opportunity to interact and discuss the experiences they were having. At one point, I entered the hospitality room to find our superintendent and a newspaper journalist discussing the governor's new legislation regarding public education in the state. On the final day of Senior Boards, one judge reminded two student ambassadors they had promised him a tour of the school. An analysis of the judges' comments and experiences must take into account these aesthetic, social, and cognitive experiences that occurred both in the presentations, the hospitality room, and the interactions between judges, students, and educators.

An analysis of the judges' comments from Senior Boards held in May of 2000 revealed three recurrent themes—knowledge, interest, and research. Of these themes, the judges referred to knowledge more frequently than the others, with interest being the next most recurring theme, followed by research. These same themes were found in the judges' comments from the 1998 Senior Boards and the 1999 Senior Boards.

Judges' Comments on Student Knowledge

Judges commented on the knowledge that students were able to demonstrate on topics as they presented their research and experiences. Most of the comments surrounding this theme were positive such as the following comment made by a judge about a presentation on superstitions: "Very knowledgeable about the superstitions she spoke about during the presentation" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 1). Yet, not all comments from judges were as positive. After witnessing a presentation on photography, one judge commented that the student was, "Enthusiastic, but had a superficial knowledge of content" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 8).

Even though judges were honest when they viewed a presentation that lacked solid content information, they also recognized students who demonstrated in-depth knowledge of their chosen subjects. Commenting on a presentation about sea turtles, one judge wrote, "You are clearly knowledgeable and did an excellent job of answering questions. Your visuals were effective and the premise was good, but the presentation was thin and didn't contain as much information as you obviously knew" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 7). This judge was able to ascertain from visuals used in the presentation, the premise of the presentation, and the manner in which the student answered the judges' questions that she had in-depth content knowledge. Despite the observation that the presentation was thin, this judge was able to detect the knowledge this student had attained. This example revealed that Senior Project is a process comprised of intricate components that included but were not limited to research information, personal knowledge from experiences, presentation techniques, as well as how the student interacted with the judges. If educators or community judges did not recognize all of the components, then they failed to grasp the knowledge that a student had mastered through the Senior Project process.

Judges on Senior Boards in 1999 also commented on the knowledge that students demonstrated through their presentations. As one judge stated, "This student surprised all of the judges with the extent of her knowledge" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 2). Yet, a student's presentation on breast cancer received this comment from a judge, "She made good use of visual aids, but there were some errors in information presented. She also lacked a broad knowledge of the subject area" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 5). A judge on the 2000 Senior Boards made a similar

comment about a presentation. "She stumbled on some facts and questions because of her nervousness. She needed to understand better the content of the Bataan March in the overall picture of the start of WWII" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, p. 8). These examples revealed that judges have not ignored the lack of in-depth knowledge in students' presentations.

Overall, judges from 1998 and 1999 as well as 2000 Senior Boards commented repeatedly on the knowledge that students demonstrated in their presentations. A presentation on open adoption received this comment, "The student demonstrated both academic/scholarly and primary knowledge of the topic" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 10). This comment confirmed that some students had taken traditional research and expanded upon it by seeking out experiences that provided first hand knowledge of the topic. This is a vital component of Senior Project. A judge on the 1998 Senior Boards provided a student with a comment that supported efforts of teachers and mentors to encourage students to experience research in addition to reading about their topics. "Her knowledge of content was all out of a book with little on the cutting edge in regard to cancer research" (Senior Boards, Judge's Comments, 1998, p. 4). For Senior Boards 2000, a student who presented his research and experiences with airbrush painting received the following two comments from judges: "He seemed to have great knowledge of his subject. Excellent! You are obviously speaking from experience" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, 1999). This young man had effectively conveyed to the judges both his in-depth knowledge from research and his experiential knowledge.

Over the three years of implementing Senior Project at SEHS, student presentations to judges from the community have increased from 49 in 1998 to 87 in 1999 and to 113 in 2000. Negative comments about students' knowledge of their subject decreased in 1999 and 2000. In fact, there were twice as many negative comments about students' knowledge in 1998 as there were in 1999 and 2000 collectively. Could one factor be teachers and mentors are doing a better job guiding students through the Senior Project process? The representative to the Georgia House from the Salzburg Estates area served as a judge on Senior Boards each of these three years. After judging presentations during the 2000 Senior Boards, she commented that each year the presentations are better with more information and a higher caliber of skill demonstrated by the students. Other judges who have judged each year that Senior Boards have been held at SEHS echoed this sentiment.

Judges' Comments on Student Research

As they did with knowledge, judges also recognized in-depth research and the lack of research. This was evident in a comment from a judge on the 1998 Senior Boards. "She knew her subject but questions showed she did not do a lot of research on the topic. Most of her presentation was from personal recall of experiences" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 2). This student had chosen scuba diving as her topic, but since she was already a certified scuba diver, her English teacher and faculty mentor both encouraged her to stretch her knowledge with more in-depth research. Obviously, the judges saw that this student did not perform necessary research into her topic.

During the 2000 Senior Boards, one judge provided the following comment, "He had done a lot of research as evident in his presentation. He was able to take a complicated

topic and make it simple to understand" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 2). This young man not only convinced the judges that he had completed in-depth research, he also presented that research in a manner through which the judges were able to grasp an understanding of the topic.

As with judges' comments on students' knowledge, negative comments about students not completing enough research declined from 1998 to 2000, even though the number of students involved with presenting to Senior Boards more than doubled during that time. The question that was raised during the discussion of student knowledge comes to mind. Could one factor be teachers and mentors are doing a better job guiding students through the Senior Project process?

Judges' Comments on Student Interest

Another theme identified in the judges' comments was wrapped around observations about the interest of students in their individual research projects. One difference that existed between the theme of student interest and the themes of knowledge and research was there were no negative comments from judges about student interest throughout the three years Senior Boards have been held at SEHS. The number of comments about student interest has quadrupled from the 1997 Senior Boards to the 2000 Senior Boards. An increase in the number of students involved with Senior Project certainly was related to the increase in comments concerning student interest. Yet, the number of students involved with Senior Project in 2000 was a little more than twice the number of students involved in 1997. While this would account for an increase in comments about student interest, the increase in comments was proportionally higher than the increase in student

participants. Hence, one contributing factor to this could be that students are choosing topics they have a higher level of interest in, and they are conveying that interest to the judges on Senior Boards.

Furthermore, remarks about student interest often included statements about the enthusiasm, confidence, and passion of the individual students. I have often had parents tell me their children do well in school on assignments that are interesting to them but do poorly on assignments that are boring to them. Students interviewed in this research echoed similar comments about choosing a topic for their senior project that was interesting. James revealed this when he stated, "If you're doing something that's boring, that's going to make it even harder. You're not going to want to do it, so if you're doing something you can pick and that's fun then it'll be a little easier to do" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 21).

Brad encapsulated the importance of student interest in assignments when he stated, "I actually enjoyed my Senior Project more than my other assignments because I got interested in what I was doing. But it's taken a lot more time and a lot more effort" (Student Interviews, 1999, p. 4). In Brad's case, he was willing to put more effort in his research than in other assignments because he was interested in what he was doing. This interest that motivated students to be passionate, enthusiastic, and self-confident about their projects was acknowledged by judges in many of their comments. Hence, student interest was a recurrent theme in both the student interviews and the judges' comments.

Judges on Senior Boards recognized the high level of personal interest many students had in their topics. On a muggy May morning four judges sat in the construction shop at SEHS and viewed visual aids displayed on a tabletop saw as a student presented his

research on log home construction. As he presented to the judges, this student's enthusiasm built, which caused one judge to comment, "The student knew his topic and demonstrated genuine enthusiasm. He presented himself in a confident manner. Good luck with building your first log home" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000).

During the 1998 Senior Boards, a group of judges interacted with a presentation on the New York Yankees. These judges were treated to a scale model of Shea stadium as the student took them back in time to the building of the stadium and the sports empire known as the Yankees. One judge commented, "he seemed to do a lot of research on a subject that he has a personal interest in" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 3). Reminiscent of a baseball manager engaged in a heated debate with an umpire about a call at home plate, this student and one of the judges became engaged in their own fairly heated discussion. One of the other judges commented, "The student did well correcting a judge's bad information about Stengel's winning streak despite the judge's assertive nature" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1998, p. 3). This high school student stood his ground on facts in his presentation even when aggressively challenged by an adult who was judging the presentation. Could one reason for this level of confidence be that the student was passionate about his topic and had conducted solid research on the topic?

For the 1999 Senior Boards, one student presented her research on the Salzburgers who immigrated to the warm southern climate in South Georgia. She also presented her experience in making Salzburger bread from an old recipe that she had found. At the conclusion of her presentation, judges' historical appetites were whetted with loaves of Salzburger bread. Her interest in her topic caused one judge to comment, "Her

presentation was very interesting and taught us something about this area" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 10).

Another student who presented to Senior Boards in 1999, delighted the judges with a lesson in painting with watercolors. Judges were given small canvases on which they were taught how to paint clouds. I enjoyed seeing these judges proudly carrying their masterpieces to their cars at the end of the day. One judge was even overheard saying, "Look at my clouds. I didn't know that I could paint." This student's love for his topic resulted in a lesson on painting that actually tapped a creative vein within the judges who experienced the art of painting.

One presentation for Senior Boards 2000 took judges into the world of tattoos. This was a research project that created some concern for me as an administrator since our county had recently banned tattoo parlors, and our school system had stated that students who had tattoos must have them covered while at school. This was a very controversial topic within the county, and I was concerned that Brad's presentation might be met with heated controversy from the judges. As I viewed the comments from the judges, my mind was put at ease. "It is obvious that Brad did a lot of research. He is passionate about his topic. He knew his subject well, good presentation, showed good self-confidence" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 3). Part of Brad's presentation was a photo album of approximately 100 tattoos. Brad had taken these pictures of tattoos he had seen people displaying on their bodies. He had seen these people at Wal-Mart where he worked part-time. Brad had stated that he carried a disposable camera around with him while he was conducting his research. When he saw a person with a tattoo, he asked them if he could take a picture of the tattoo. He was careful not to reveal the identity of the

person in the photograph. Brad even took a picture of my tattoo for this project. The amount of time, effort, and money spent on his project was evident in his presentation and in the score the judges gave him. Surely, this was an example of personal interest motivating a student. Judges' comments often reflected an awareness of the amount of time and energy that a student put into her/his project, which was a reflection of the interest that the student had in the topic.

For the 1999-2000 school year, one student, Carrie, chose art therapy, as a topic, but she could not find an expert in art therapy within our geographical area. So, she volunteered as a mentor to first grade students to complete the experiential component of Senior Project. This mentorship began in the fall of her senior year and continued into her last week as a high school student in the spring. Her interest and enthusiasm for her topic came across to the judges along with her talent and ability as both an artist and as a mentor. Comments from judges made this apparent. "Excellent job! You have a wonderful rapport with children and incredible artistic talent. Good luck as you further your education and pursue your career." Another judge recognized the joy that Carrie found in art and the manner in which she shared that joy with others. "Excellent—you have a gift. Continue to use it so by your work others can find beauty and joy in art—good luck." A third judge acknowledged the intrinsic motivation and dedication that Carrie exuded during her presentation. "You certainly have a sense for what you are doing. The fact that you volunteer at the elementary school is both meaningful to the students and to you as well. You have a wonderful talent, both as a teacher and as an artist"(Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 9). Carrie had accomplished more than an oral presentation. She had shared her enthusiasm for her topic in a way that not

only earned her a very high score on her presentation, but also garnered praise from the judges for her talent, abilities, and passion.

A few presentations received more than praise from judges; these judges also commented that the presentations should be shared with a broader audience that included young people within our community. A presentation on child abuse received such a comment. "Excellent—it would be great for her to tell her story to all our young people. Commend her for talking about a subject so touchy" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 2000, p. 6).

A presentation on Rohypnol, the date rape drug, received similar accolades from judges. "Her subject needs wide distribution. Very poised, good interaction with listeners; showed great interest in her topic. She came across as being sincere and knowledgeable—very good" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 5). This student commented to me before entering the presentation room that she was nervous about presenting to a panel of all male judges. But, her genuine interest in her subject helped her deliver a high quality presentation. The judges' comments attested to her ability to overcome her nervousness of presenting such a delicate subject.

A presentation on cults received similar praise from the judges. "Your presentation and your research could be used to help all young people to understand how the mind control works, and so, you communicated hope in an otherwise alarming topic" (Senior Boards, Judges' Comments, 1999, p. 11). Comments from judges about presentations such as these revealed that when judges feel the passion and importance of a topic, they want it shared with others especially if the topic concerns a vital social issue that impacts young people.

Interviews with Teachers

Another source of data for analysis in my study came from teachers at SEHS. I interviewed two English teachers who were involved with implementing Senior Project and two teachers who served as faculty mentors. Since I am an assistant principal at SEHS, these interviews were held as reflective conversations rather than as formal interviews. In an effort to keep teachers from feeling scrutinized by a supervisor, notes were made of the interviews similar to fieldnotes taken of observations. During reflective conversations, I attempted to lead these teachers in a reflection about their involvement with Senior Project and how the Senior Project process affected students. From these fieldnotes, a thematic analysis was conducted. Themes identified from the interviews with two English teachers who implemented Senior Project with their classes included comments about student motivation, communication skills, and community involvement. The two faculty mentors mentioned student motivation, communication skills, and faculty/staff support for Senior Project. Hence, two of the themes identified from comments made by these educators were identical, while the third theme was related but took a different slant with each group. The two English teachers commented on community involvement with Senior Project mainly during Senior Boards, while the two faculty mentors commented about support students received from school staff throughout the Senior Project process.

Perceptions of English Teachers Concerning Student Motivation

The first theme that emerged from interviews with English teachers revolved around perceptions of student motivation. Ms. Peabody, one of the English teachers

implementing Senior Project, frequently made reference that students in her classes did not come down with "senioritis" as quickly and as severely as students had in years prior to Senior Project. Ms. Peabody stated, "I had heard that Senior Project helped control senioritis, but I really didn't believe it until that first year." She commented that students complained about the work for Senior Project, but they did not become as complacent as students had in previous years. The other English teacher, Ms. Tinker, was a first year teacher when she began Senior Project for the 1997-1998 school year, so she did not have a point of reference from which to make a comparison similar to that of Ms. Peabody. Yet, Ms. Tinker commented on the interest and motivation that most of her students had in a long-term project. Both of these teachers commented that the commitment students made to a long-term project provided a positive learning experience.

English Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Communication Skills

A second theme that I identified from my interviews with English teachers dealt with communication skills that students learned and exhibited through Senior Project. Ms. Peabody remarked that each year students seem to improve in the quality of their presentations to Senior Boards. Yet, she also commented that teachers in grades 9 through 11 need to concentrate more on writing and research skills, so students will be better prepared for Senior Project research papers. Concerning research writing, Both Ms. Peabody and Ms. Tinker made the strongest negative comments about Senior Project. They commented about having to cut the amount of literature that they teach in order to provide instruction in basic writing and research skills. This represented a curriculum issue that can be solved by utilizing Joseph McDonald's (1993a, 1993b) concept of planning backward. If educators and the schooling community form a picture of what

seniors should be able to do, then that picture can serve as a standard from which to construct curricular objects for grades 9 through 12. At SEHS, work has been ongoing with respect to planning backward. The majority of this work is in the English department where efforts have been made to focus instruction on the writing process in grades 9 through 11. Admittedly, more efforts are needed in this area.

In conversations with Ms. Peabody during the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, she expressed concern for the quality of presentations that students would make in the spring. During Senior Boards 2000, Ms. Peabody shared with me her delight and surprise in the high level of student quality on their presentations. She stated, "Overall, this year was the best year so far for Senior Boards." She still had not seen research papers that had met the standards students should be attaining, yet students were delivering more polished and better presentations to Senior Boards. Thus, Senior Project at SEHS seemed to have made improvements from the perceptions of these two English teachers, but they acknowledged that more was needed especially in the area of writing.

While written communication was noted as a weak area that needed amelioration, oral communication skills was cited by these teachers as an area in which they and their students had made great strides. Ms. Peabody acknowledged the first year of Senior Project that she knew very little about assisting students with their oral presentations. So that year, we enlisted the assistance of the county's 4-H coordinator, Ms. Edwards. She became a valuable resource that first year, and Ms. Peabody was an excellent student. From Ms. Edwards, Ms. Peabody learned how to make visual aides that grabbed the attention of the audience. In fact, she spent quite a bit of time learning how to make three dimensional visual aides and how to use Velcro as a visual aide tool that fastened the

judges' attention on the topic being presented. For Senior Boards 2000, Ms. Peabody no longer felt the need to have an outside resource come into her classes to instruct students in the art of presentations; she had become an expert in this area and could guide students as they created stunning presentations. Hence, oral communication skills have increased in quality due to the efforts of Ms. Peabody, Ms. Tinker, and Ms. Edwards.

English Teachers' Perceptions of Community Involvement

One final theme these two English teachers mentioned as vital to Senior Project was the amount of community involvement during Senior Boards. Both of these teachers commented on how Senior Project has brought the community into the school to view what students had learned and were able to demonstrate. Ms. Peabody not only recognized this accomplishment; she also took her sentiments about Senior Project on the road. She and I presented the version of Senior Project at SEHS to a local Rotary Club and to another county's teachers during their county-wide teachers' meeting. Ms. Peabody utilized what she had learned from Senior Project in a gifted education class she took during the 1999-2000 school year, and she presented the Senior Project ideology to the applied communications conference in Georgia. Senior Project had allowed the community into the school where students shared their skills and knowledge, and it allowed educators to take the accomplishments of Senior Project out into the larger community. This was noted as an important component of Senior Project, not only by the teachers involved, but also by the principal of SEHS and by the county's Superintendent of Schools.

Faculty Mentors' Perceptions Concerning Student Motivation

The first theme that emerged from interviews with faculty mentors concerned student motivation. In order to obtain guidance from educators, students involved in Senior Project at SEHS were required to have a faculty mentor. Students could also choose a mentor outside of the faculty, but they must have a faculty mentor. These faculty mentors were more easily accessible to students, English teachers, and administrators than mentors from the community were. Turning to the comments made by faculty mentors, I found that frequently faculty mentors mentioned both student motivation and communication skills. These mentors provided a somewhat different perspective on student motivation. The most frequently cited negative comment from these mentors was that some students did not meet with them as often as they should have.

Another negative comment centered on how some students did not accept the help they were given by mentors. This was evident in one student's presentation about the Bataan Death March. Ms. Chance, a business teacher, was this student's mentor and had given her quite a bit of guidance. The student had her facts confused and needed help. Ms. Chance turned to her father, a retired history teacher, who had a vast supply of knowledge concerning World War II. She even gave him the student's paper to read. When Ms. Chance returned the paper to the student, she also gave her copies of articles that would help her in citing the correct facts concerning World War II and the Bataan Death March. After this student presented to Senior Boards, I found her crying in the hallway. When I asked her why she was so upset, she stated that one of the judges told her there were errors in her facts concerning World War II. Ms. Chance had attempted to help this student, but the student had ignored her assistance. Consequently, the student's

research paper and her presentation suffered because she was not motivated enough to accept the help from her mentor.

Some students relied heavily upon their faculty mentors for guidance, as was evident with another student who had chosen Ms. Chance as a mentor. This student included a Power Point presentation as a part of his Senior Boards. Ms. Chance used her knowledge as a vocational teacher to assist this student. During the presentation to Senior Boards, Ms. Chance remained in the presentation room to add moral support and to work the lights.

Another mentor, Ms. Rinard, who is a music teacher, commented about how students she mentored accepted her guidance throughout the Senior Project process. Since Ms. Rinard taught chorus and humanities and was educated in the fine arts, she counseled students to use dramatics and to involve their audience in their presentations. One student heeded her advice and taught judges how to paint using watercolors. Another student presented on religious ceremonies and delighted the judges with a presentation that involved kosher foods. Ms. Rinard even assisted one student, who was researching choral music, in teaching the SEHS Chorale a musical piece by a Russian composer. As part of this student's presentation, he directed the SEHS Chorale in singing that piece of music.

Faculty Mentors' Perceptions Regarding Communication Skills

The second theme identified from interviews with faculty mentors centered on communication skills. In regard to comments from mentors about communication skills, there was a great deal of praise for how well students were doing with presentations to Senior Boards. Ms. Chance commented about how the communication skills students were learning would help them after high school whether they went to college or straight

into a vocation. Ms. Rinard stated that students were learning through Senior Project to communicate not only to an audience of judges but also with community members who assisted students during their experiential component of their projects. She stated that this was a vital part of education for high school students as they prepared to enter an ever-changing adult world.

Faculty Mentors' Perceptions About Faculty Support

A final theme identified in the comments made by faculty mentors centered on support that students received from faculty/staff. Both Ms. Chance and Ms. Rinard remarked that Senior Project allowed students and teachers to work with each other in a relationship that was different from the classroom teacher-student relationship. This was seen as a positive outcome of Senior Project. In addition, these mentors acknowledged that Senior Project brought many faculty/staff members together in support of students. In fact, one mentor observed that a student commented about feeling as if everyone at the school was cheering her on saying, "You can make it." These comments about faculty/staff support were focused more on how mentors helped students find resources within the community to help with the experiential component of Senior Project. This support was typically manifested in the form of making contacts for students who needed the assistance of a community member who was an expert on the student's research topic.

At the end of a school day, I found Ms. Francis, a science teacher, and one of the students she was mentoring in my office. Ms. Francis was calling orthodontists to find some resources for this student's presentation. The student had spent some time with a local orthodontist, but this orthodontist would not allow the student to borrow supplies to use in her presentation. So, Ms. Francis was making contacts to secure assistance from

another orthodontist. After making several calls and leaving messages at various doctors' offices, one orthodontist called the student that evening and agreed to supply the materials for which she was searching. This is an excellent example of how faculty mentors assisted students and how local professionals provided not only assistance but also visual aids to be used in presentations.

While two mentors I interviewed did comment that all faculty mentors did not provide enough assistance for students, they did remark that most faculty/staff members were supporting students and the Senior Project program. This was evident in how both Ms. Chance and Ms. Rinard mentored their students as well as in the manner that I observed several other teachers such as Ms. Francis assisting students.

Even though the English teachers frequently cited the theme of community involvement, I found that community involvement was important to mentors as well. Ms. Chance was instrumental in bringing the community into the school during Senior Boards. Since she teaches a class that involves a co-op program between students and businesses, she used her contacts with local business personnel to obtain judges for Senior Boards from the business community. Her father, who is a retired history teacher, and her husband, who is an engineer with the Army Corp of Engineers, both volunteered as judges. She also contacted others in the business community who served as judges, including an executive from a local bank. Hence, community involvement was a part of some mentors' efforts to make the Senior Project experience a celebration of what students at SEHS had learned and were able to demonstrate.

My Reflections as a Researcher and Administrator Regarding Senior Project

The final source of data for my study included my reflections concerning my participation with Senior Project. In this study, I was a participant-observer who not only gathered data from interviews and observations but was also involved in the implementation of the Senior Project process for students, teachers, and community members. My involvement as Senior Project Coordinator for SEHS allowed me to use my position as an assistant principal in providing administrative support for this program.

As I reflected upon the three years that Senior Project had been implemented at SEHS, I realized that administrative support was vital in setting up a new curricular program that had as much involvement from faculty/staff members and from the community as Senior Project does. I found that as an administrator, I was able to enlist assistance from both faculty/staff and the community in a way that I could not have accomplished as a classroom teacher.

For instance, there were several negative comments about Senior Project during the first year that we implemented the program. These comments came from teachers who were complaining that all Senior Project was doing was getting non-English teachers to do the work of the English teachers. To solve this dilemma, I drafted a memo that outlined the concepts of Senior Project, and I conducted faculty meetings to provide information about why faculty mentors were needed for this program. I also identified faculty members who were the most vocal in negative comments about Senior Project and had them serve as judges on Senior Boards. Once faculty members saw the process of Senior Project, in particular the culminating experiences for Senior Boards, the negative comments, for the most part, subsided and support for the program began to increase as we concluded the first year of Senior Project and began the second year.

During the first and second year that Senior Project was implemented at SEHS, we were going through our first Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation process. This presented an opportunity for Senior Project to become part of our school improvement plan. Ms. Peabody was serving as our SACS Steering Committee Chairperson. She and I convinced faculty/staff members that Senior Project embodied many of the objectives that we wanted in our school improvement plan. Consequently, Senior Project became part of our formal school improvement plan. By achieving this, wide spread support for Senior Project was cultivated within the school.

In setting up Senior Project as a curricular program at SEHS, financial support was needed in funding field trips, purchasing textbooks on the writing process, mailing invitations to community members who served as judges on Senior Boards, setting up a hospitality room for judges, and purchasing certificates to acknowledge support from judges as well as to recognize students who had completed Senior Project. Financial support was obtained in the form of two grants from SERVE. These grants allowed us to provide students, teachers, and community members with high quality Senior Project experiences.

As Senior Project at SEHS became established, opportunities to share our implementation of this program with the larger schooling community became available. Along with teachers and students from SEHS, I have presented our implementation of Senior Project at 13 conferences. SERVE conducts a Senior Project Institute each year, and I have presented at this institute each of the three years that Senior Project has been implemented at SEHS. In 1998, Ms. Peabody and I jointly presented at this institute. During the 1999 and 2000 institutes, my wife, a first grade teacher, and I presented how

Senior Project can be tied to initiatives that include planning backward from the high school into the elementary schools and how high school seniors can mentor elementary school children as part of Senior Project's experiential component.

In addition, SERVE has an annual fall Forum on School Improvement, and I have presented the SEHS implementation of Senior Project program at two of these forums. Ms. Peabody also assisted me in one of these presentations. As part of a conference for congressional leaders in Washington, D.C., held by SERVE and four other educational laboratories, I was invited to share how Senior Project can be utilized as a school reform initiative.

Furthermore, I have presented research on Senior Project at American Educational Research Association Annual Conferences in Montreal and in New Orleans. During the third year of Senior Project at SEHS, I was contacted by the League of Professional Schools and asked to present about Senior Project. For this conference, I asked Ms. Tinker to give an English teacher's perspective of Senior Project. Ms. Rinard also presented the perspective of a faculty mentor, and a student, Marnie, joined us to provide the prospective of a student who was experiencing Senior Project. As an administrator, I was able to include both teachers and students in presentations by setting up substitutes for the teachers and release time from school for students. After presenting at the 1999 SERVE Annual Fall Forum, I was contacted by a county near Macon about presenting the Senior Project program. I also asked Ms. Peabody to assist me with this presentation.

Locally within the Salzburg Estates Community, I have presented about Senior Project to a Rotary Club and to the county's chamber of commerce. Ms. Peabody assisted me with the presentation to the Rotary Club, which allowed us to provide our local

community with information about our efforts in providing the Senior Project experience for our students. This presentation helped secure community support for the program. After the 2000 Senior Boards, a curriculum coordinator from our county board of education contacted me about presenting the Senior Project initiative to the Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instruction Supervisors.

As I reflected upon these presentations, I could see how Senior Project has allowed SEHS to celebrate student achievements beyond the boundaries of our campus. Teachers and students have been able to share with me at several of these conferences, which has given credibility to the program with our county and beyond. This certainly has gone farther than my original expectations for Senior Project when I first decided to implement the program in the summer of 1997. I did not envision the level of community involvement within the school or the level of the school's involvement within the community. My expectations for Senior Project were limited to the extension of students' research experiences within the classroom that included a presentation. These expectations have been met and surpassed since the implementation of Senior Project at SEHS in 1997.

Another opportunity to take Senior Project outside of the classroom walls and school hallways presented itself during the 1999-2000 school year. My wife had wanted to set up a mentorship program between art students at SEHS and her first grade students at Salzburg Estates Elementary School. In October 1999, I worked with the art teacher, Mr. Corning, at SEHS in identifying students who could serve as mentors in this program. A student, Carrie, who was researching art therapy for Senior Project became instrumental in forming this mentorship program. As an administrator, I was able to set up release time

weekly for art students to leave our campus and spend approximately two hours a week with my wife's first grade students. The headaches involved with this endeavor seemed to disappear when I viewed Carrie presenting to Senior Boards in May. She set up the presentation room as if it were an art gallery complete with work she had created, along side of the work created by first grade students she had mentored. Among the kaleidoscope of colorful images in this room sat two of the first grade students with whom she had worked. These two students shared self-portraits with the judges and read a piece of writing they had written about their experiences in the art mentorship program. I watched, along with the two proud mothers who viewed their children through the lens of video recorders. These two first grade students and Carrie presented to community leaders in a manner that truly reflected a community effort. Certainly, there was as much pride on my face as on the faces of these mothers, for I felt my heart swell with joy and appreciation for being part of what these students had accomplished. Certainly, these Senior Boards were a celebration of what education is all about from first grade through twelfth grade.

My reflections on my involvement with Senior Project also reminded me of the numerous contacts that have been made within the community not only to secure judges for Senior Boards but also to provide community mentorship for students as they took their research to the streets and business in our area. I utilized my position as an administrator to arrange release time for students who went into the community to work with a community member who had expertise in the areas students were researching.

As I reflected upon the experiences of students, I remembered the joyful expressions of high school seniors as they returned from field trips to Georgia Southern University

where they utilized the resources of Henderson Library. These field trips were taken after I had taught lessons to students in English classes about narrowing research topics, which allowed me to re-enter the classroom and the world of teaching. My position as an administrator also allowed me to support what English teachers were teaching their students, which allowed students to see that the concepts of Senior Project reached beyond the English classroom.

Each year, I have had the responsibility of discussing topics with students that may be considered inappropriate for high school research. At times, I have had to redirect topics so that they were more appropriate for high school students to study. As students chose topics and prepared to begin research, English teachers provided me with a list of proposed topics. I discussed these topics with the teachers to decide if the students were stretching their knowledge and to determine if the topic may be too controversial for them to study. Thus far, I have not completely rejected any topic, but I have redirected students, so their research, experiences, and presentations were appropriate for them and for the community to whom they presented their findings.

To be sure, there were ethical questions regarding this process, but this process was not much different from the process I have undergone in proposing my dissertation to my committee. I have received guidance in the direction that my dissertation has taken, and I have given similar guidance to high school students as they have proposed research for their Senior Projects.

As an administrator, I have been able to arrange for students to participate within the community and for the community to participate within the school. Each spring, as we prepared for Senior Boards, I have made numerous contacts in securing judges. My

secretary, Ms. Devons, has been an invaluable assistant in scheduling judges, setting up presentation rooms, and arranging for the welcoming of judges each day of Senior Boards. She set up the student ambassadors who greeted and signed-in the judges each morning. This is another example of how an administrator has access to resources that the classroom teacher does not have.

Finally, my reflections take me to the judges' hospitality room, which was really a joint-effort in celebrating the accomplishments of students and teachers at SEHS. This hospitality room has been a joint-effort of students from home economics classes, special education classes, of my secretary, and of my efforts to ensure that judges feel welcome and experience the pride that each of us has in our school. The results were evident on the faces of judges as they left the school each day carrying the framed certificates that acknowledged their volunteer service at SEHS. For the 2000 Senior Boards, judges from outside of SEHS logged over 160 volunteer hours within our school. This was in addition to the countless hours that community members spent assisting students as they experienced what they had researched for Senior Project. Furthermore, faculty/staff members spent countless hours mentoring students and serving on Senior Boards.

My administrative support for Senior Project has allowed me to help build this program, and I am proud of what we have accomplished. Yet, I have acknowledged that we need to expand our horizons by providing more opportunities for students to expand their knowledge and skills. Teachers in all subject areas at SEHS need to assist as we challenge students to think outside of the boxes we call classrooms and to experience learning that is academically, economically, and socially relevant for teenagers who stand on the verge of entering an adult world. These teenagers need the freedom to grapple with

diverse topics, which may take them to the borders of what is acceptable within our community. As these teenagers experience learning that takes them beyond the confines of our school's resources, they may find their individual voices as adults within our community.

Summary

In summary, the data collected for this study revealed various issues that confirmed the quality of Senior Project, but this data has also presented challenges for the future implementation of Senior Project at SEHS. The themes identified from the interviews with students revealed that some students see Senior Project as a preparation for post-high school experiences, an opportunity to incorporate personal interest into their academic assignments, and a freedom to pursue those personal interests. Comments made by judges on Senior Boards uncovered themes dealing with student knowledge, research, and personal interest. Reflective conversations with English teachers who worked with Senior Project divulged themes that included student motivation, communication skills, and community involvement, while faculty mentors revealed themes of student motivation, communication skills, and faculty/staff support. My reflections dealt with administrative support that involved students and teachers in activities which reached beyond the confines of traditional schooling and cultivated support within the school and the larger community for Senior Project.

As I analyzed the themes identified from students, community members, teachers, and my reflections, I began to see similarities among them. Students talked about preparation for life after high school, which certainly included knowledge derived from research and communication skills, which parallels comments, made by judges and

teachers. Students, community members, and teachers commented on the personal interest and motivation observed within individual research projects. Finally, the theme of community involvement and support for the Senior Project program was mentioned by teachers and within my personal reflections. The only theme that was not clearly repeated across each of the groups dealt with freedom. Students were the only ones who talked specifically about the freedom that Senior Project provides. Could the reason for this be that students were the recipients of the freedom; thus, they saw this freedom as vitally important? My reflections also mentioned how Senior Project provided the freedom for students to search for their own voices within the larger community. Consequently, these themes were woven together into a tapestry depicting the perceptions of students, teachers, members of the community, and administrators who collectively celebrated the culminating experiences of high school seniors at SEHS.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

As I conclude this study, I reflect on the initial research question that has taken me into a critical inquiry of the Senior Project program at Salzburg Estates High School (SEHS). My research question formed a perspective from which I began to inquire and gather data for this study. Now, I ask "Did Senior Project as implemented at SEHS provide students the freedom to study a topic of personal interest and the freedom to exhibit personal dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without violating the freedom from intrusion?"

As stated in the introduction to this research, I attempted to raise three fundamental issues that are embedded in the general institution of schooling and particularly in the organization of institutionalized high school education. First, I asserted that an overemphasis on standardized test scores exists. Secondly, I contended that students rarely have the freedom within academic settings to explore, investigate, and critically inquire into areas of personal interest even though many schools maintain that they encourage critical thinking. Thirdly, I declared that a relationship persists between the lack of freedom in schools and the overemphasis on standardized testing. These three fundamental issues were spun into the thread from which my study was woven.

Now, that the study has been completed, I stand back and look at the finished product with its intricacies formed from the perceptions of students, teachers, community members, legislative mandates, curriculum theories, philosophical ideologies, and my own experiences. Yet, I know that merely gazing upon this work with a reflective eye is not enough. I must pull the threads and unravel the images that are before my mind's eye.

I must examine how I arrived at the analysis of my data and how that analysis addresses my research question with its three fundamental issues looming above it.

To begin my thoughts concerning this conclusion, I must ponder the three fundamental issues that are twisted tightly among the inquiries that I made throughout the 1999-2000 school year at SEHS. As I researched emphasis within the state of Georgia regarding standardized test scores, I sadly became more convinced that the magnitude of importance placed upon these scores drives schooling, and in so doing drives away freedom, creativity, innovation, and individuality. Georgia has placed so much emphasis on test scores and statistical representation of the efforts of our educators, community members, and our boys and girls until the experiences in the classroom fade in comparison. Yes, when educators and politicians are focused on "stats" as Governor Barnes (1999, p. 3) seemed to be when he stated that the statistical scores of students in Georgia are screaming at us to hurry up and raise test scores, then individual students have faded into the background of statistical analysis. We cannot rebuild our public school system on test scores. Schools are living entities that cannot be reduced to a percentile ranking. I agree with Governor Barnes that we need to rebuild our schools. I agree that we need to create opportunities for our high school graduates, and we can do this by examining what we are "doing and what we are failing to do" (Barnes, 1999, p. 3). Yet, I disagree with politicians and educators who proclaim that the answer to problems within our schools will be found in raising test scores. We must ask whether we are merely training students with preparations for graduation or are we emancipating them by encouraging critical inquiry?

We should we be more concerned about quality educational experiences, than we are about statistics on tests. We must take time to be learners and to help our students become learners who utilize curiosity to inquire about the unknown. Should our educators supplement with innovative pedagogical praxis the prepackaged curriculum that claims to raise test scores? No, as Governor Barnes (1999) stated, we must hurry up! We must get serious about doing more! We must raise those test scores!

When Governor Barnes (1999) and other political leaders talk about "getting the results we want" (p. 3), whom are they speaking for and what are the results about which they speak? From a critical theory perspective, this type of rhetoric serves to reproduce the dominant culture and maintain the status quo within society. Too frequently, politicians legislate mandates that apply to all schools and to all school children. This merely standardizes curriculum and makes educational experiences generic for all students, teachers, and communities. Legislative mandates and standardized schooling ignore the unique flavor of each school site, each classroom, and each child. Why do politicians mandate institutionalized schooling? According to Governor Barnes, an emphasis on standardization and on accountability for that standardization will raise test scores, and in his mind, this will create opportunities.

As I conclude this study, I ask, "What does it mean to have a high test score?" Without statistical reports in the newspaper, can the community tell that test scores have been raised? What experiences will our educators and our boys and girls have as they "hurry up" to raise test scores? Will raised test scores really mean that quality educational experiences have been shared within our classrooms and in our communities? In schools where community volunteers provide support for our boys and girls, will we have to turn

away those volunteers because there is no time for such experiences? Remember that we must "hurry up" and raise test scores.

Definitely, I can say that Governor Barnes seems sincere about hurrying up to raise test scores. I invited him to judge on Senior Boards at SEHS or to at least send a member of his staff to participate in this educational experience, which provides an alternative to standardized testing. Governor Barnes declined the invitation and did not send anyone from his staff to at least look into what U. S. Senator Coverdell called an "innovative education program" in his letter to me. To be sure, the Governor is a busy man. Yet, U.S. Senator Coverdell sent a member of his staff to participate with Senior Boards. State Senator Jack Hill participated on Senior Boards as did State Representative Ann Purcell. State Superintendent Linda Schrenko was invited to participate. She could not, but from her staff, Dr. Joe Searle and Dr. Eddie Bennett participated as judges on Senior Boards. Alas, the governor and his staff were too busy; they were certainly "hurrying up" to raise test scores in Georgia's Public Schools.

Examining Georgia's preoccupation with test scores is a depressing endeavor, yet it is not as disheartening as it is for our boys and girls who sit for hours hunched over their answer sheets methodically darkening ovals with a number two pencil while awaiting the teacher's cry "Time's up!" Inquiring into Georgia's business partnership with standardized testing is not as depressing as it is dismal to students who for a week during the high school graduation test do not see their English teachers. These students are hunched over their answer sheets in a classroom taking this test, and the remainder of the students are warehoused in the cafeteria, library, and where ever empty space can be found, while their English teachers administer the high school graduation test to all

eleventh graders. These warehoused students are given busy work to complete each day in an effort to maintain order and control over them, because their teachers must proctor the high school graduation test. Again, we must "hurry up" and raise test scores, but at what expense are we doing this? How many quality interactions and experiences are our boys and girls missing as we force them to idly sit "Waiting for Graduation" and just maybe a high score on the high school graduation test and on the SAT?

Merely a glimpse is all I have given into the high school world of standardized testing. My wife who teaches first grade has given me a glimpse into the world of standardized testing in the primary grades where six and seven year old boys and girls sit hunched over their answer sheets darkening in ovals on the ITBS that is given each year. This is not to mention the numerous practice hours that teachers are to be providing for their students, so test scores may be raised. Nor, have I mentioned in this conclusion the many other standardized testing experiences that have gripped schools from the elementary level through the high school level. The picture of six and seven year olds methodically darkening in ovals on answer sheets is not my vision of education that grips young minds. These standardized testing situations certainly do not capture the curiosity of students in a manner that fosters critical inquiries. As those six and seven year olds grow, they yearly continue their apathetic relationship with standardized testing until they reach high school where as 16 and 17 year olds they sit still hunched over answer sheets, still methodically darkening ovals, still waiting for the teacher's cry "Time's up!" The only change that is visible besides the size of the desk is the level of monotony those years of standardized testing have layered upon these boys and girls.

My second fundamental issue dealt with the freedom that students rarely are given to inquire into areas of personal interest as part of their academic studies. Wonderment that drives the spirit of invention and exploration has been the hallmark of many great minds. Yet, how much wonderment do we inspire in our students as we attempt to cultivate knowledge in their young minds? Freire (1998) identifies one of the fundamental types of knowledge as "that which stresses the need for spontaneous curiosity to develop into epistemological curiosity" (p. 83). I assert that education occurs when curiosity is ignited and developed into a desire to know more, to understand more, to ask why, and to seek more than answers to trivial questions. This can be done in classrooms and schools where the interest or curiosity of students is allowed to have a voice within the design of pedagogical pursuits. A challenge for educators "is to protect the spirit of inquiry, to keep it from becoming blasé from overexcitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise upon trivial things" (Dewey, 1997/1910, p. 34). In order to accomplish this students must obtain more than a mechanical memorization of facts about something in which they are interested.

Dewey explicated the necessity of curiosity when he stated:

> Curiosity is not an accidental isolated possession; it is a necessary consequence of the fact that an experience is a moving, changing thing, involving all kinds of connections with other things. Curiosity is but the tendency to make these conditions perceptible. It is the business of educators to supply an environment so that this reaching out of an experience may be fruitfully rewarded and kept continuously active. (Dewey, 1997/1916, p. 209)

For students to engage in an experience that is active and that inspires a desire for further inquiry, they must be given freedom to be engaged in the study of topics that interest them. Dedicated educators can find ways in which these topics will also include lessons that meet the standards set by administrators, school board members, and politicians. As

Dewey stated, "It is the business of educators to supply an environment so that this reaching out of an experience may be fruitfully rewarded and kept continuously active" (Dewey, 1916/1997a, p. 209).

I contend that at no other point is this needed more than at the point where students are preparing for graduation—the senior year of high school. At this juncture in their lives, students are planning to enter post-secondary education, the workforce, or even the armed forces. They are preparing to make that precarious walk across a ceremonial graduation stage that leads to the world of adulthood with its political, economical, social, and cultural issues. Once our students leave our guidance, they will find that life's concerns become magnified through their adult eyes. As educators, we have an ethical responsibility to develop critical inquiry within out students, so they will be able to critically examine the perplexities of their adult lives and of our society. Hopefully, if our schools graduate students who are critical learners, then our future—their future—will be filled with less injustice and more human agency.

What experiences will we have given them in preparation for graduation? Will these experiences have provided them emancipation from the tedious monotony created by lessons in how to sit quietly in a desk and take a test? Will their experiences have taught them the importance of human agency and the need for them to find their voices as adults? Students are typically taught to accept institutionalization. Some lessons have benefits to them such as a work ethic that demands punctuality and a dedication to an assignment that causes students to see the task through to the end. Yet, students are also taught to accept everything without question. They are conditioned to ignore injustices, to quietly wait until the bell rings, the day ends, the year ends, and graduation comes to

liberate them into the world of adulthood where they will be able to make their own decisions.

Yet, a great disservice has been done to these students. For when they reach adulthood, they find that they have not been taught how to make decisions, how to recognize injustice, how to embrace human agency. For too many, this relegates them to frustrated lives as drones merely working out their days without the knowledge of why they are working except to put food on the table. What freedoms have these students and adults been taught? As Maxine Greene said, to many Americans"freedom is still taken to be a given in this country: to be an American is to be endowed with freedom, whether or not one acts on it or fights for it or does anything with it" (Greene, 1988, p. 26). The "freedom from" negates the human spirit; to merely state, "I have the freedom from something" is made from a passive stance from where individuals cannot take an active role in ameliorating the injustices within society. This is what institutions such as schools attempt to guarantee (i.e., freedom from disruption). The "freedom to" (i.e., freedom to decide, to debate, and to question) is a positive freedom that is much different. Certainly, we want both types of freedom for our children and for ourselves. But to have the "freedom from" without the "freedom to" is not to be truly free at all. Students and educators need emancipatory educational experiences that inspire them to struggle for the freedom to question, to debate, to ask way, to learn, and to decide. Hence, steps toward graduation should not be paradoxical to emancipatory educational experiences.

The third fundamental issue that I have addressed in this research focuses on the relationship between the lack of freedom in schools and the overemphasis on standardized testing. When legislative agendas, such as Governor Barnes's, that stress the

raising of test scores become the focal point of public education, then educators realize their jobs depend on raising test scores. What is the result of such a conclusion on the part of educators? Many will teach to the test; some will provide inappropriate assistance that the state calls cheating and a violation of pedagogical ethics. Others will become disheartened and seek fulfilling intellectual employment outside education, if they can find it.

What will be the consequences for students? Some will submit to the tedious practice of darkening in ovals without making stray marks. They will comply with the mindless memorization of trivial facts to be recited on answer sheets or rather darkened in the appropriate ovals. Others will become disillusioned with such experiences and will become behavior problems; some will eventually drop out or be expelled from the system of schooling. The commonality between educators and students will become a realization that school is where there must be submission to demands of what McLaren defines as the "student state." "Youngsters in the "student state" are generally quiet, well-mannered, predictable and obedient.... Metonymy is prevalent and helps to produce predictable and restrictive cultural forms" (McLaren, 1986/1999, p. 91). Boys and girls identify the "student state" with hard work, boredom, compliance, and punishment. Outside the "student state" exists another condition for students, which McLaren (1986/1999) identifies as the "streetcorner state." In the "streetcorner state," students are physical and demonstrate unfettered exuberance. As critical educators, we need to merge some of this unfettered exuberance into the "student state."

A challenge exists for pedagogues to be in touch with the issues that fascinate boys and girls. These fascinations, when critically addressed, can be woven into the

curriculum, so that teachers and students engage in a collective inquiry that will invigorate schooling and will reach out into the problems faced by our society. Giroux's (1989) comments are particularly relevant to this type of pedagogy.

> I believe that schools need to be reconstructed around a cultural politics and pedagogy that demonstrate a strong commitment to engaging the views and problems that deeply concern students to cultivate a spirit of critique and respect for human dignity that is capable of linking personal and social issues to the pedagogical project of helping students to become critical and active citizens. (Giroux, 1989, p. 150)

Acknowledging the importance of what concerns students is a major step toward revitalizing the educational experiences within our schools. This energy demands that educators critically evaluate the educational endeavors of themselves and their students. A critical pedagogy obliges educators and students to be involved in some form of human agency.

For Greene, freedom is being able to determine for yourself the type of person you ought to be (in Ayers & Miller, 1998). What type of people do we want our high school graduates to be? Do we want graduates who will be active citizens within the community? Do we want graduates who will work to make our communities better places for all citizens? If so, we must do more than help them achieve high test scores. We must teach them to become actively involved in the issues with which society grapples. A pedagogy that embraces such objectives will also allow students the freedom to question, inquire, and search for answers. This pedagogy will inspire passion and help guide that passion into activities that are socially active.

Yet, how does Senior Project address such pedagogy? First, the emphasis is taken off standardized testing as preparation for graduation. Hence, schooling becomes more than preparation for graduation when students and teachers are engaged in education that

emancipates. Through Senior Project, students under the guidance of caring educators design projects that are more than just research-based (Noddings, 1992). These projects also reach out into the community of which the school is a part. Traditional educational experiences are a component of this endeavor, for students are engaged in conducting research and in writing traditional research papers. Through these components of traditional education, students learn the nuances of written communication, in which their passionate interests drive their research. Secondly, students are guided by faculty and community mentors to take their research into the community and to experience what they have researched. This allows students to see the practicality of research—research that touches the humanity around us. Thirdly, students present their research and experiential findings to a board of community judges. This brings the community into the school to celebrate what students have learned and are capable of doing, which is advocated by Gardner (1983), McDonald (1993), Noddings (1992), SERVE (1999), and Sizer (1985, 1992, 1996). Programs that dissolve the barriers between individuals within the schooling community certainly have a social agenda. These curricular programs might be termed neo-progressivism, but I assert that they also embody many of the elements of critical theory. Hence, I firmly believe that labels for people or for ideas only serve to restrict the richness and possibilities within people and their ideologies. Therefore, I believe that my study does in fact embrace elements of critical theory while at the same time embracing sentiments of neo-progressivists.

Now, I question, "Did Senior Project at SEHS fulfill these pedagogical objectives? I acknowledge that the potential exists for this to occur. But, it has not taken place at the levels that I have outlined. Students for the most part shied away from critical endeavors

that dealt with human agency including injustices within society and within the institution of schooling. A few reached out and grasped, even if superficially, learning that was emancipatory and that took on the personae of human agency. Yet, more guidance is needed so students can embrace pedagogy that emancipates them, prepares them for life after graduation, and teaches them the passion of human agency.

While interviewing Janis, a senior at SEHS, I asked if she thought that students for the most part did not choose topics for research that embraced areas of human agency and social injustice because they were focusing on careers or on college majors. Her response echoes sentiments that educators and legislators need to consider when designing curricular programs.

> With the way things are here, we are so limited in the way we can express ourselves with speech that I think it is almost an actual paranoia to choose something like that. I don't think we want to go and touch on that base because we've been told, you know, just do what you have to do and don't say anything and be done with it. (Student Interviews, 2000, p. 28)

Her perception underscores that we have conditioned students merely to sit passively and wait for graduation, or as Janis said, "we've been told, you know, just do what you have to do and don't say anything and be done with it." When students have been conditioned throughout their years in schooling to just do what they have to do, to be silent, and to be done with the assignment and with schooling, then we have trained them not to think, not to reason, not to be passionate, and not to learn.

As McLaren (1986/1999) states, boys and girls in the "student state are generally quiet, well-mannered, predictable and obedient.... Metonymy is prevalent and helps to produce predictable and restrictive cultural forms" (p. 91). Sure, it makes managing classrooms and schools more efficient when students are docile, compliant, and they are

quiet with behavior that is well mannered. By creating cultural forms that are predictable and restrictive, we have ensured the reproduction of society through schooling experiences that are not resistive to these experiences or to the injustices within society. Thus, the institution of schooling is best served by standardization in test scores, in behaviors, and in experiences. Unfortunately, this standardization also negates the passion in students that could give rise to human agency although it may give rise to test scores that are higher. Whether an institution utilizes medication to keep its patients docile or a school utilizes schooling procedures and methods that keep students submissive and compliant, the results are the same—mindless bodies sitting idly by "Waiting for Emancipation."

Confrontation of Two Theories: My Dilemma

As has been stated in this study, I find many of the concepts of critical theory to be attractive and beneficial in structuring innovative curricular programs. Yet, there are portions of critical theory that are not compatible with my view of schooling and education. My perspective strives to improve our current educational system from within, through initiatives of compassionate educators and community members. I do not believe that we need to overthrown our school systems and clean the slate in order to build the type of school that would foster critical inquiry. Yet, I do aspire to challenge the status-quo concept of standardized achievement, standardized testing, and standardized experiences for out students. My goal is similar to that of the progressivist who designed The Eight-Year Study. I desire to teach students using a non-traditional pedagogy that will foster learners who defy mandates and defy standardization with the ability to think, to reason, to debate, to question, and to ask why or why not.

Contributions to Curriculum Literature

My research contributes to the body of research on Senior Project by focusing on a single school as Senior Project was implemented into the curriculum. Combs (1995) researched Senior Project as implemented in a single English class. Egelson and Harman (1998, 1999) researched Senior Project as practiced in schools across the Southeast. My research investigated how a single school made Senior Project part of the curriculum, and how this program fits into the ideology of critical pedagogy. The ideology upon which programs such as Senior Project have been built has roots in progressive education as advocated by educators such as Dewey (1900/1990, 1910/1997c, 1916/1997a, 1934/1980, 1938/1997b, 1972) and those educators involved with The Eight-Year Study (Akin, 1942). Furthermore, Senior Project embodies the potential to emancipate students by providing them more than the "freedom from" by also providing them the "freedom to" as espoused by Greene (1995, 1988), Freire (1981, 1993/1970, 1998), and Darling-Hammond (1997, 1998). In addition, my research recognizes the importance of human agency and the hegemonic influences that reproduction theories explicate while acknowledging the concepts of resistance theories in challenging the repression promoted by the institution of schooling (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

Hence, Senior Project is a curricular initiative that offers hope for education within our schools. Through pedagogy of hope and possibility (Freire, 1994), schools can become more than sites of preparation for graduation through raising standardized test scores. Senior Project offers a rite of passage from teenager to adult as called for by Kessler (1999/ 2000). Likewise, the premise behind Senior Project offers a senior year transition project similar to the one outlined by U.S. Secretary of Education Riley (2000).

As Riley states, "Surely we can offer our young people some exciting and meaningful challenges between midterms and the Senior Prom"(Riley, 2000, p. 16).

Consequently, my research on Senior Project adds to the research conducted by Egelson and Harman (1998, 1999), Summers (1989), Combs (1995), as well as the research by Ancess and Darling-Hammond (1994). As long as curricular programs such as Senior Project exist and as long as research into such programs is conducted, there exists hope that the institution of schooling will be transformed into something more than preparation for graduation; schooling may yet become education that embraces emancipatory experiences liberating both students and educators.

Summary

My research question did not result in the answer that I expected. Can Senior Project as implemented in a high school in southeastern Georgia provide students with the freedom to study topics of personal interest and the freedom to exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures without violating the freedom from intrusion? I found that at SEHS many factors prevented students from becoming emancipated to the point of studying topics of personal interest that also freed them to exhibit dissatisfaction with rules and procedures found within schooling and within society. There were no major disruptions to schooling at SEHS as a result of Senior Project. This could be because students, for the most part, chose to study topics that did not exhibit dissatisfaction with schooling or with injustices within the larger society.

Yet, it is my assertion that potential exists within the Senior Project program for at least disruption to the institutionalized routine of preparation for graduation through efforts to merely increase standardized test scores. Furthermore, this disruption could

result in critical inquiry by students, teachers, and community members if they begin to experience the "freedom to" as part of educational experiences. Education of this nature provides intellectual disruptions, which will help change the face of schooling into the freedom of education.

Programs such as Senior Project offer more than an alternative to standardized testing. They offer more than a break from routines that confine students to desks hunched over answer sheets with pencils poised to darken in the correct oval. These programs as postulated by Senior Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools, SERVE, The Eight-Year Study, and others offer hope amidst the monotony of schooling where boys and girls are trapped within the "student state" that is advanced by standardization and institutionalization. Hope exists in any program that places students within the larger community and the larger community within the school to collectively embrace education that critically examines the political, economic, social, and cultural elements, which influence the act of education. Through endeavors similar to the one studied in my research, we may yet achieve what Dewey called for at the beginning of the 20th Century. "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 7).

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Senior Project Research Paper Requirements

The requirements listed below are minimum requirements for the term paper portion of the Senior Research Project. Just meeting the minimum requirements does not guarantee you a passing grade. Failing to meet the minimum requirements, however, does assure you of failing designated portions of the assignment.

1. A minimum of 100 notecards

2. A minimum of 10 sources from the following areas:

    a. Traditional encyclopedias - no more than 2 of your 10 sources may come from this category
    b. Reference books
    c. Newspapers
    d. Magazines
    e. Non-fiction books
    f. On-line databases
    g. Internet - you must have at least one source pulled from the Internet
    h. Interviews
    I. Films, tapes, cd's
    j. Radio or television broadcasts
    k. Documentaries
    l. Correspondence
    m. Computer programs

3. A minimum of three quotes for use in the research paper

GRADING SYSTEM FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

Notecards	Category 50
Bibliography Cards	Category 30
Content/Organization	Category 50 weighted 3 times
Grammar/Mechanics	Category 50 weighted 2 times
Research Elements	Category 30 weighted 2 times
Presentation	Category 20 weighted 2 times

Other guidelines will be provided as the Senior Research Project unfolds.

Questions for English Teachers and Faculty Mentors Involved with Senior Project

1. What is the purpose of Senior Project?
2. What are your feelings about being involved with Senior Project?
3. What are any differences you see in the Senior Project assignment compared to other assignments that you have given your students?
4. How has Senior Project affected your teaching?
5. What does requiring Senior Project say about education at SEHS?
6. How much independence do students have in the Senior Project process?
7. What are any restraints that are placed on the independence of students in the Senior Project process?
8. How have your students reacted to the independence given them to direct their Senior Project?
9. What has been the reaction of the faculty to Senior Project?
10. How have parents of your students responded to Senior Project?
11. How has the community reacted to Senior Project?
12. When discussing Senior Project with colleagues from other schools, what is their response to your description of the Senior Project process?
13. What are your feelings about the topics that students choose for Senior Project?
14. What do you think guides the choices that students make for their Senior Project?
15. How do you view the role of the mentors in Senior Project?
16. What, if any, differences have you detected in teachers who have served as Senior Project mentors?
17. What are the reactions of students about their mentors?
18. What guides students in choosing a mentor?
19. What advice will you give next year's seniors about choosing a mentor?
20. What advice should be given to mentors about Senior Project?
21. What, if any, changes have you seen in the way students view the role of their mentors as teachers?
22. How much guidance do students receive on Senior Project?
23. What type of guidance do students receive?
24. Do you feel that students are directed, assisted, or controlled during the Senior Project process? Why?
25. How much creativity and originality do you see students using in their Senior Projects? Describe
26. When students present their Senior Project experiences to judges on the Senior Boards, what do you think the judges are able to tell about the students?
27. What do you think judges on the Senior Boards are able to tell about our school as a result of seeing students present Senior Projects?

Interview Questions for Students Involved with Senior Project

1. What do you think is the purpose of Senior Project?
2. What are your feelings about being involved with Senior Project?
3. What are any differences you see in the Senior Project assignment compared to other assignments that you have been given by teachers?
4. How has Senior Project affected your senior year in high school?
5. What does requiring Senior Project say about education at SEHS?
6. What comments do your parents make about your involvement with Senior Project?
7. How do you think the community views Senior Project?
8. How much direction do you have in the Senior Project process?
9. What has prevented you from having more power to direct your Senior Project experience?
10. When choosing your topic, what areas did you consider before making your final choice?
11. How much influence did your teacher have on your selection of your topic?
12. What does your topic reveal about you and your education?
13. How much independence did you have in selecting your topic?
14. What, if any, topics did you reject before making your final choice?
15. What are your experiences with your mentor in the Senior Project?
16. Why or why don't you see the mentor as being important to your Senior Project?
17. What, if any, changes have you had in the way you see the role of your mentor as a teacher?
18. How much guidance have you received on your Senior Project?
19. Do you feel that you were directed, assisted, or controlled during the Senior Project process? Why?
20. How much creativity and originality did you use in your Senior Project? Describe
21. When you present your Senior Project experience to judges on the Senior Boards, what will they be able to tell about you as a student?
22. What do you think judges on the Senior Boards will be able to tell about our school as a result of seeing you and your classmates present Senior Projects?
23. After graduation, when you are asked about Senior Project, how will you describe this experience?
24. What advice do you give next year's seniors about Senior Project?
25. What advice do you have for teachers who serve as mentors in Senior Project?
26. What advice do you have for English teachers who assign Senior Project as part of their classes?
27. What advice would you give freshmen and sophomores about preparing for Senior Project?

ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC

STUDENT_____

POINTS SCALE

5	Outstanding evidence of the descriptor
4	Substantial evidence of the descriptor with few flaws present
3	Adequate evidence of the descriptor with few detracting flaws
2	Some evidence of the descriptor and/or numerous detracting flaws
1	Little or no evidence of the descriptor and/or serious flaws present

DESCRIPTORS	POINTS
KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENT: The student effectively integrates information from the research-based essay and product. The speaker shows a comprehensive grasp of the topic and clearly conveys this to the audience.	5 4 3 2 1
PRESENTATION FORMAT: The introduction effectively engages interest in the topic and establishes a sense of purpose or direction. The body of the presentation conveys essential and critical ideas that flow logically and smoothly and are supported with appropriate illustrations or examples. The conclusion effectively ends the presentation.	5 4 3 2 1
DELIVERY: The student maintains poise throughout the delivery. The student uses effective presentation techniques such as posture, gestures, voice projection, and eye contact. The delivery includes an effective command of language, proper pronunciation, and appropriate word choice. The student uses effective visuals that enhance the presentation.	5 4 3 2 1
SENSE OF AUDIENCE: The presentation is appropriate for the intended audience. The student convinces the audience of expertise about the topic.	5 4 3 2 1
IMPROMPTU QUESTIONS: The student responds confidently, appropriately, and accurately to questions.	5 4 3 2 1
TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS:	_____

COMMENTS:_____

Directions for HSGT Testing, Content Areas
March 27-31, 2000

The yearly burden of testing juniors for the High School Graduation test is once again upon us. In order to offer our students the best testing conditions, it will be necessary for everyone to work together. Almost everyone will be affected in some way by the need to rearrange schedules, meeting places, and cover classes. Your cooperation is essential both before and during the testing to ensure that everything goes as smoothly as possible. We hope that we have addressed most issues in this memo; however, if you foresee or encounter any problems, please let us know as soon as possible so that we can make adjustments. Thank you in advance for being flexible, patient, and positive.

All students will report to first period as usual so that attendance details may be taken care of. We will make an all call at approximately 8:40 to signal the beginning of the testing period. At this time students being tested will move to their designated testing area (they will have five minutes to arrive there). Seniors will need to report to the media center and Juniors will report to classrooms in A Wing. Juniors will be assigned to rooms alphabetically. Their names will be posted on each room door, and the breakdown is listed below.
Juniors should report to the following classrooms at the beginning of testing time:
Testing will take place according to the following schedule:

Monday, March 27, 2000
1st period - 10 minutes for attendance
8:40 - 8:45- juniors and seniors move to testing areas
8:50 - 9:15- Distribution and completion of answer sheets and distr. of test booklets
9:20 - 10:35 – Language Arts Test (60 min.)

Tuesday, March 28, 2000
1st period - 10 minutes for attendance
8:40 - 8:45 - juniors and seniors move to testing areas
8:50 - 9:00 - answer sheet and test booklet distrib.
9:00 - 10:35 - Math Test (60 min.)

Wednesday, March 29, 2000
1st period - 10 minutes for attendance
8:40 - 8:45 - juniors and seniors move to testing areas
8:50 - 9:00 - distr. answer sheets and booklets
9:00 - 10:35 – Social Studies Test (90 min.)
*Examiners - Follow this schedule for 3/29 strictly. There is no extra time built in.

Thursday, March 30, 2000
1st period – 10 minutes for attendance
8:40 – 8:45 – juniors and seniors move to testing areas
8:50 – 9:00 – distr. answer sheets and booklets
9:00 –10:35 – Science Test (90 min.)
*Examiners - Follow this schedule for 3/29 strictly.
There is no extra time built in.

Friday, March 31, 2000
1st period - All make-ups in media center as soon as attendance is taken

Those teachers who will be testing in A Wing will need to direct their students to the specified locations and teachers in the lunchroom. Some of those teachers who are covering an examiner's classes may elect to take the students back to their rooms. I will leave it to the teachers to work this out and **announce to classes where to report**. Additionally, they will need to supply the substitutes with a roll for each period and lesson plans. Written or reading assignments are recommended. The substitute's name is beside each teacher's name.

Examiners' Instructions

1. Mrs. C and Mrs. R will distribute and collect all testing materials. Each examiner should account for all materials prior to any student leaving the testing room. Every test booklet and answer sheet must be accounted for each day. Mrs. C and Mrs. R will also be available for restroom breaks for examiners throughout the testing time.

2. Do not misplace your manual; it must be returned on the final day of testing. You need to read this carefully prior to the first day of testing. Notify me if you have any questions. Please note an addition to your manual – The state sent a memo indicating a certain portion of the directions had been left out. I have provided that information for you with your manual. Make a note to yourself to be certain to insert these directions as you read from the manual.

3. You will be given an allotment of calculators and pencils. We will not collect these daily but will on Thursday.

4. The only days that you should have students needing additional testing time will be Wednesday and Thursday since both the Social Studies and Science tests last 90 minutes. The state guidelines indicate that a regular ed. Student may receive up to three hours total testing time, so tell students not to feel rushed. If any students indicate that they need additional time to finish, collect their booklets and answer sheets and give them to either Mrs. R or Mrs. C. Send the students to the media center so that they can complete testing. We will meet them in the media center to give them their test booklet and answer sheet. ***Do not send the booklets with the students.***

5. No scratch paper is allowed. Students may write in their test booklets.

6. As students prepare their answer documents, please walk around the room and scan to see that they complete each section. ***Both they and you need to double-check the form number gridding carefully.*** Likewise, make certain that they are recording their answers in the proper section of the answer document. Be certain that they do not mark in the "local use" and "optional code" sections. ***IMPORTANT!!!!!! They must bubble the "X" column in the social security number section. Also, they must bubble any blank columns not used for completing their names.***

7. Alphabetizing the answer sheets daily will assist you. Please be certain to alphabetize them on Thursday before you turn them in. **Separate the answer sheets from the test booklets!!!**

8. If you teach juniors, please stress the importance of doing well on these tests. Also, ask them to bring two #2 sharpened pencils with them on each test day. Since some of them may finish early, they might also wish to bring reading material. They should not take any other work out until after you have collected their test booklet and answer sheet.

9. Pay particular attention to the time constraints on Wednesday and Thursday.

10. Each day you must have all students testing sign in on a roster (Bright yellow form will be provided). This must be completed and returned daily.

11. You will be given a daily checklist (cherry colored paper) to complete and return with your packet.

12. Post a copy of roster on your door.

13. Test security is of utmost importance. Do not leave testing materials unattended at any time. Do not rearrange the order of your test booklets.

PROJECT PROPOSAL
SEHS SENIOR RESEARCH PROJECT

1. Briefly describe the subject of your research.

2. What attracts you to this topic?

3. What is your level of expertise on this topic as you begin this research?

4. What do you hope to gain from this research?

5. What do you plan to use to demonstrate your knowledge? (This may change as your research progresses.)

_____ _____

Student's Signature Parent's Signature Date

SENIOR PROJECT RUBRIC

NAME_____

1.	A minimum 12 project hours are completed **(25 points)**	_____
2.	Hours are documented on appropriate forms with all information complete. Documentation is turned in on time **(10 points)**	_____
3.	Signed mentor sheet - 2 meetings **(10 points)**	_____
4.	Project represents an extension of the research paper **(10 points)**	_____
5.	Quality work utilizing creative thinking, critical thinking, and/or technology and requiring that "extra mile" **(20 points)**	_____
6.	Physical evidence of project provided on assigned date **(25 points)**	_____
	TOTAL	_____

COMMENTS:

MUSTANGS
South Effingham High School

South Effingham High School
Mark Winters, Assistant Principal
1220 Noel Conaway RD Guyton, GA 31312
(912) 728-7524 / Fax: (912) 728-7529
e-mail: mwinters@effhingham.k12.ga.us
or
BMW.Winters@worldnet.att.net

April 17, 2000

Dear Community Leader:

You are invited to celebrate the culminating experience in the public education of this year's high school seniors. We would like for you to assist us as we share the final educational experience of these students. Beginning on May 4th, students will commence giving presentations before judges on Senior Boards. We would be honored if you would volunteer to be a judge for these Senior Boards. In previous years, judges have volunteered an hour or two during the day, and some have volunteered to help us out all day. We greatly appreciate any help you are able to provide. These Senior Boards will be held on May 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11 from 9 AM until 3 PM. We will have four students presenting each hour during the day. If you are able to assist our students and to share in their learning experiences during this time, please call the school or e-mail me. The school will be closed for Spring Break from April 21st through April 28th.

Senior Boards constitute a culminating experience that demonstrates what students have learned during their years in school. Senior Boards provide students with an opportunity to give a formal speech based on research and a learning experience. The student must exhibit knowledge and skill on a specific topic of personal interest. Within their presentation, students are required to use visual displays along with the oral presentation. Finally, these students have the opportunity to think on their feet as they respond to the questions from the judges. Judges score each presentation on a score sheet provided by the school.

Therefore, as springtime warms the imagination and students are anticipating that ceremonious walk across a graduation stage, seniors at South Effingham High School are not sitting around passively awaiting graduation. These seniors are busy preparing their presentations for Senior Boards. These presentations are a component of Senior Project, which is similar to the new initiative that US Secretary of Education Riley is advocating—a "Senior Year Transition Project." In addition, Senator Jack Hill and Representative Ann Purcell have both assisted us with Senior Boards and have praised the hard work of our students. Join with these leaders and our students as we attempt to engage students in meaningful educational experiences.

Again your assistance is needed and greatly appreciated. Please call or e-mail with the time that you are able to serve as a Senior Boards Judge.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Winters

PAUL D. COVERDELL
GEORGIA

CONFERENCE SECRETARY

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1004

CHAIRMAN:
HEALTH CARE SUBCOMMITTEE
FINANCE COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN:
MARKETING, INSPECTION AND
PRODUCT PROMOTION SUBCOMMITTEE
AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

May 12, 2000

Mr. Mark A. Winters
Assistant Principal
South Effingham High School
1220 Noel Conaway Road
Guyton, Georgia 31312

Dear Mr. Winters:

Just a quick note to thank you for including my Regional Director, Don Stewart, in your Senior Boards program. I appreciate your efforts with this innovative education program. Please give my best to your students, they are to be commended for their dedication to enhancing their research, writing and oral communication skills.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact Don in our Savannah office at (912)238-3244 if we may be of any assistance to you or your team.

Thanks again for all you do.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Coverdell
United States Senator

PDC/drs

Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs
Georgia Southern University

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Memorandum

Phone: 681-5465 P.O. Box 8005 Fax: 681-0719
ovrsight@GaSoU.edu -- or -- ngarrets@GaSoU.edu

To: Mark A. Winters
Curriculum Studies

From: Neil Garretson, Coordinator
Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: September 2, 1999

Subject: Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

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On behalf of Dr. Howard M. Kaplan, Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I am writing to inform you that we have completed the review of your *Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects* in your proposed research, "Fascist Rituals or Student Initiated Performances." It is the determination of the Chair, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, that your proposed research adequately protects the rights of human subjects. Your research is approved in accordance with the *Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects* (45 CFR §46101(b)(1)), which states:

> (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

However, this approval is conditional upon the following revisions and/or additions being completed prior the collection of any data:

1. You will need to revise your informed consent form/letter and replace the use of the term "anonymous" with "confidential." Your methodology is such that you cannot guarantee the respondents anonymity, only their confidentiality.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about these conditions of approval, please do not hesitate to contact the IRB Coordinator. Please send a copy of all revised and/or additional materials to the IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs (PO Box 8005).

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the exempted research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. Please notify the IRB Coordinator immediately if a change or modification of the approved methodology is necessary. Upon completion of your data collection, please notify the IRB Coordinator so that your file may be closed.

Cc: Dr. William Reynolds, Faculty Advisor

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Interview Participant:

My name is Mark Winters. I am assistant principal at South Effingham High School and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am currently gathering data to be used in my doctoral dissertation. I am interested in the various performances that are part of the South Effingham High School experience. I believe that the performances of students and educators at South Effingham High School provide certain perspectives concerning the quality of education that students receive. The performances I will be investigating are both part of the standard curriculum and part of the extracurricular activities that together constitute the high school experience.

This letter is an informed consent document giving me permission to interview you and/or your child as part of my research. If you later decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study, there is no penalty for doing so. If you agree to participate or for your child to participate, then please sign on the appropriate line below. You may return the signed letter to me or have your child return it. The questions that will be asked in the interview focus on the type of schooling performances that are part of the high school experience. I will ask about perceptions that you or your child has concerning the activities and performances at South Effingham High School. I believe that a high quality educational experience is achieved as we all work together in determining which experiences best serve our children and our students. During this interview, you or your child may chose not to answer one or more of the questions asked without penalty. The responses to the interview will be kept anonymous in an effort to conceal the identities of the research participants. This will be accomplished by using pseudonyms and in other ways concealing the identity of the participants. If you would like a copy of results from this study, you may indicate your interest below.

If you have any questions about this research project, please call me at 728-7524. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study they should be directed to Georgia Southern University's IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465.

Thank you,

Mark Winters

I hereby give my consent to be interviewed for the research project depicted above.

_____ _____

Participant Date

I hereby give permission for my child to be interviewed for the research project depicted above.

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian Date